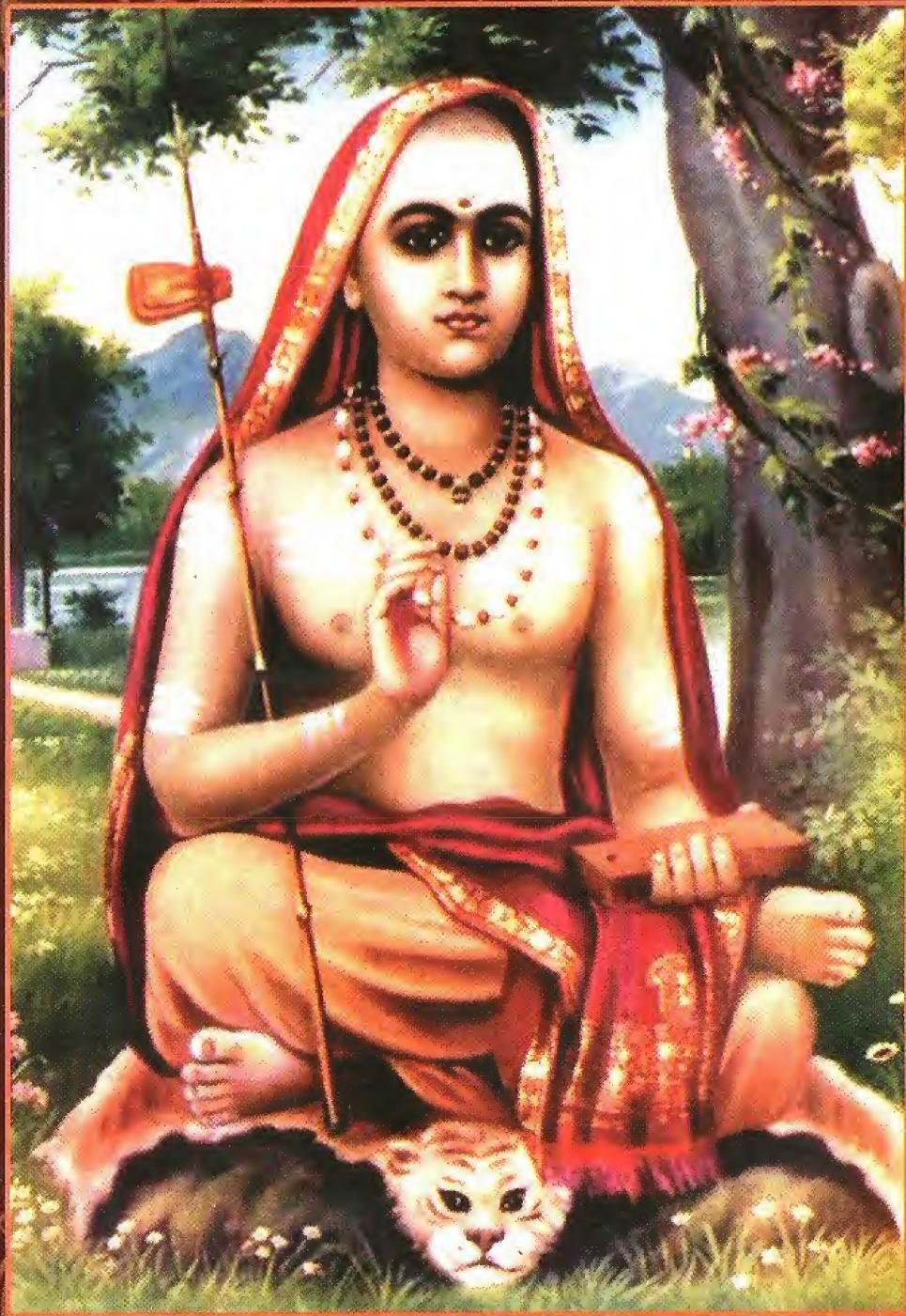


# A Vedanta Miscellany



Tulaseeteerthan



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**TULASEETEERTHAN**

**Sri Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrama  
Ottappalam**

**A VEDANTA MISCELLANY**  
(English)

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Dedicated at the lotus feet of  
Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna

in memory of the *acharyas* and my fellow-students  
of the Gita class held in this Ashrama form 1940 to 1950 :  
Swami Amalananda, A.K.T.K.M. Vasudevan Nambudiripad,  
T.V. Krishnan Nair, K. Ramakrishna Varma,  
K.N. Chandrasekhara Sarma and T. Krishnan Nair

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## Publisher's Note

This book, *A Vedanta Miscellany* by Tulaseeteerthan is a companion volume to the one published in Malayalam entitled *Sadhana and Sakshatkara* and is our fourth publication. The two chapters in this book - *Adi Sankaracharya*, and *Eka Sloki* - are translations of the same topics from the companion volume. The matter contained in the other chapters is shaped from talks given by the author in 2006 when he accompanied me on a lecture tour of Singapore and Malayasia arranged by Sri. Prakash, an ardent devotee of Sri Gurumaharaj.

I take this opportunity to Thank Dr. M. Narendranath, San Diego, California, U.S.A. and Swamini Bodhananda, Chinmaya Mission, Kaikalur, Andhra Pradesh for sponsoring the publication of this book as also Sri. K. Jayanarayanan for his service in preparing the typescript of this book. I place on record my thanks to Sri. B. Sreeprakash, Sri. Premananda Prabhu. R, and to M/s. Pellippuram Offset Press for their efforts

in getting ready the well-printed and beautifully got up volume for release on the auspicious occasion of the Swami Nirmalananda Birthday and Temple Consecration Day celebrations this year. I hope and pray that the book will have a wide readership among the students of Vedanta and the English-reading public.

Swami Kaivalyananda  
President, Sri Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrama,  
S.R.K. Nagar, Ottapalam - 3



# ĀDI SANKARĀCHĀRYA

*Sruti-smriti-purānānāmālayam karunālayam  
Namāmi Bhagavad-pāda-Sankaram lokasankaram*

It is accepted on all hands that the doctrine of *Advaita-Vedanta* is the crown and glory of the several systems of philosophy in the world for no better reason than that it succeeds in giving the most comprehensive and convincing explanation regarding the nature of three things — the Creator, the created beings and creation — as well as their inter-relatedness. And among its teachers, the name of Sri Sankara comes first. It is so intimately associated with *Advaita* that Sri Sankara is looked upon even as the founder of the doctrine, which, of course, is not true. For, *Advaita*, like any other law of nature, is an eternally self-existing truth which requires no founder at all. However, it was the ancient sages who 'discovered' the truth and so they are honoured as *rishis* or seers of truth. What these men of wisdom saw and heard, they taught those who approached them seeking knowledge



and wisdom. It is Sage Veda Vyasa who is universally accepted as the supreme teacher of *Advaita - Vedanta*. If one can point out a spiritual teacher who can almost equal him, it is Sri Sankara. *Bhagavān Sootrakāra* ( Veda Vyasa) and *Bhagāvan Bhāshyakāra* (Sri Sankara) are like the two wheels of the chariot of *Advaita – Vedanta* balancing and complimenting each other.

In Vyasa's works, there is God's plenty. They give a colourful portrayal of men and women in all sorts of situations - – life's regrets and longings, hopes and fears, agonies and ecstasies and so on. They lay hold on the entirety of life and are universal in that they deal with the four-fold goal of life— *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (lust or desire) and *moksha* (liberation) — which is also the four-fold motivation for human action. It is said that the thoughts, ideas and ideals not found in his works can be found nowhere else. From Sankara's works, however, more than half the world of Vyasa escapes. Descriptions of men and women in conflicting emotional situations are studiously avoided. The focus of attention is on the doctrine of *Advaita* and each word is used to make the philosophy of *Vedānta* convincing and acceptable to the discriminating intellect. Sri Sankara's arguments are so logical and persuasive that no serious student of philosophy can deny their force or validity set against any sound rationale or tested on the touchstone of everyday experience. And no teacher of *Vedānta* has written so voluminously on the self-same



theme of *Advaita*. His works are exquisite examples of lofty philosophy in happy harmony with consummate poetic beauty and charm, which is why they continue to make their irresistible appeal even to-day, nearly thirteen long centuries after they were written.

*Sanātana Dharmā* has always welcomed diversity in thought-systems on godheads and modes of worship. But it has been equally careful not to let separateness become oppositeness or diverse views and practices degenerate into narrow creeds or fanatical dogmas. What troubled the world of thought during Sri Sankara's time was not so much this diversity as rampant intellectual anarchy. Most of the leaders were atheists denying the Self or wrongly identifying it with the body, the senses, the mind etc. They were not only argumentative but also intensely dogmatic and would have nothing to do with any view-point other than their own.

Sri Sankara's mission in life was to defeat these men of deluded intellect in dialectical debates and make them accept the principles of *Advaita* enshrined in the *Upanishads*. This was the daunting task which the *Achārya* fulfilled within his short life-span of thirty-two years. No wonder, then, that he is looked upon as the incarnation of Lord Siva, the fountain-head of all knowledge. In a certain sense, it was Sri Sankara who succeeded in giving *Advaita* the firm foundation of reason as well as the



authority of the *Vedās* for which the instruments he had chosen were the Commentaries(*bhāshyās*), the Treatises(*prakaranās*), and the Hymns(*stotrās*) which had the common objective of pointing out *Advaita*, the One without a second, as the ultimate and supreme truth.

It is generally true that we lack a sense of history in so far as we are indifferent to recording important events in our social life accurately or in detail, particularly in the lives of saints and spiritual masters like Sri Sankara. These holy men are concerned only with God and His glories and they seldom speak about themselves or leave significant biographical hints in their works which are helpful in re-constructing their lives. Except for a few laudatory poems on the *Achārya* by his disciples, there is precious little that they have left behind by way of dependable biographical accounts. In fact, the only source, apart from myths, legends and tell-tale stories, for an account of the Saint's life is *Sankara-Vijayam*, the title commonly given to the many works dealing with his life. They were written in different periods of time by *Sankarāchāryās* or by scholars attached to different *Sankara-mutts*. They are more panegyrics than hagiographic and, in many respects, they give contradictory and conflicting accounts. Be that as it may, let us try to get a picture of Sri Sankara's life and teachings from the old source-books as well as from the modern studies.



Sri Sankara was born as the only son to Sivaguru and Āryāmba in 788 A.D. At Kaladi in Kerala. The new-born was given the name 'Sankara' because he was the fruit of his father's penance and prayers to Lord Siva for a son. As ill-luck would have it, Sankara lost his father when he was three years old and so it was his mother who had to take charge of his upbringing. It took only three short years for Sankara to master all the different branches of knowledge taught in the *Gurukulam* (school) in those days. It was an intellectual feat far beyond the ability of a precocious child or even a genius, which is why Sankara is believed to be an incarnation of Lord Siva.

Soon after Sankara completed his school education, it dawned on him that he was not to become a mere house-holder leading a worldly life. He was convinced that he was destined to renounce the world and to become a world-teacher of *Vedānta*. His life's mission was to sweep away the cobwebs that had come to accumulate on the world of thought and to restore *Advaita* to its rightful, pre-eminent place. Getting the consent and blessings of his mother, Sankara left her and went away to become the disciple of Govindāchārya, the greatest teacher of *Vedānta* in those days, who was staying at Omkar Ashrama on the banks of the Narmada. The *Achārya* initiated Sankara to the study and practice of *Vedānta* at which he exceeded the expectations of his *Guru*. He was overjoyed to know that the boy-scholar was his worthiest disciple to write authoritative



commentaries on *Prasthanā-thraya*, the three Institutes of *Vedānta* - the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma-Sootrās* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Persuading his disciple to agree to his wishes, the *Guru* entered *mahāsamādhi*. In deference to the wishes of his *Guru*, Sankara left for Kasi to spend his days in prayer and worship of Lord Siva from whom he was to get the final direction for his future course of action. Sankara was a mere boy of ten or eleven when he reached Kasi. But his vast learning and his profoundly God-centered life won him a large number of ardent students and admiring followers within a short time. As days passed on, eager souls thirsting for knowledge began to seek his holy company and to listen to his words of wisdom. In spite of his young age, Sankara came to be honoured as *Sankarāchārya*.

Achārya Sankarā's encounter with an outcast while he was staying in Kasi was an event of far-reaching consequence not only in his life but also in the history of world thought. Early one morning, after a dip in the holy Ganges, when the *Achārya*, accompanied by a few of his disciples, was proceeding to the temple of Lord Siva, he saw a wretched outcast in dirty rags standing on the narrow path blocking his way. This naturally annoyed the *Achārya* who shouted at the outcast, 'Avaunt, begone'. To the utter surprise of the *Acharya*, the



outcast then spoke these words to him in a winsomely polite way: " Whom did you ask to move off — the inert body or the conscious soul?. In either case, your stand is untenable, for all bodies made of substances like flesh, blood, bones and so on are equally impure whereas the soul is eternally pure. How come, then, O noble one, that you were affected by this delusion of duality that one is a *brahmin* and the other is an outcast?" For a moment, the *Achārya* was stunned into silence as the shocking realisation came to him that he stood condemned and the outcast fully vindicated. But he was quick in readily owning up his error and accepting the outcast as his *Guru*. As he rose up after falling prostrate at the feet of the outcast in deep devotion and gratitude, he saw not the outcast but the serenely smiling Lord Siva. The Lord then directed the *Achārya* to write commentaries on *Prasthāna-thraya* so as to bring out the truth of non-duality as the heart of the *Vedantic* lore. Blessing the *Achārya*, Lord Siva vanished and the *Achārya* with his disciples wended his way towards Badrinath in the Himalayas.

Sri Sankara completed his masterly commentaries on the *Prasthanana-thraya* during his four-year stay in Badrinath which marked the end of his life-time but the fulfilment of only one half of his life's mission. It was Veda Vyasa, so the story goes, who extended the *Achārya's* life by another sixteen years so that he could preach *Advaita* among the leaders of thought and get it accepted as the ultimate philosophical truth and the



central teaching of the *Vedas*. This was successfully done when he got the better of Mandana Misra, the celebrated *Meemāṃsa* scholar as well as the Kashmiri scholars in philosophical disputation. The whole land accepted *Advaita-Vedānta* as the quintessence of *Vedic* wisdom and Sankarāchārya as its greatest teacher. His ascending the “Chair of Omniscience” (*sarvajna-peetham*) was a mere formality of the fact unanimously accepted by the world of thought and philosophy.

However, Sri Sankara’s mission of life did not end even with this splendid triumph. Many things remained to be done for the sake of future generations. No doubt, his commentaries would be the lamp unto the feet and the light unto the heart of the seekers of knowledge. But they could be of use only to a select few — those who are intelligent and familiar with the many branches of knowledge. For the less intelligent and not so well-read, he wrote the treatises (*Prakarana-granthās*) like *Ātma-bodham*, *Viveka -choodāmani* etc., which will enable the less scholarly to get an access to the commentaries. The Hymns he had composed are for the sake of the beginners, the class to which most of us belong! The point to be remembered here is that the theme common to these three types of his works is the truth of *Advaita* although its treatment came to be different. One gets some idea of the grandeur of his works when one knows that to have a fair grasp of their meaning with the help



of annotations and explanatory notes by his disciples and others, it takes a life-time's effort!

Hinduism accepts many forms of worship of diverse godheads on the ground that the many are the manifestations of the One divinity approached differently by men of different mind-sets. The aim is not to retain the many but to reach the One. So, Sri Sankara with due regard to the traditional system of worship, reduced the godheads to six — Vishnu, Siva, Sakti, Ganapati, Subramanya and the Sun-god. Thereby, he came to be known and honoured as the founder of the six forms of worship (*shanmata-sthāpaka*). Again the *sanyasins*, during his time, presented a picture of utter anarchy. They belonged to no tradition or order and followed no code of conduct. Most of them were wandering beggars in ochre clothes and not true renunciants. They were neither learned nor ascetically inclined. All the same, they passed muster for holy men. These charlatans were a law unto themselves and were not easily amenable to any discipline. It was into the lawless life of these *sanyasins* that Sri Sankara introduced the "ten-fold order" (*dasa naami*), like Puri, Giri, Vanam, Saraswati etc., each of them having distinct codes of conduct and rituals. From then onwards, all *sanyasins* belonged to one or the other of these ten orders.

As a model for *mutts*, he founded four *mutts* in the four corners of the land and installed as their heads, his four chief



disciples— Padmapāda at Govardhan Mutt at Puri in the East; Totaka at the Jyothir (Sree) Mutt at Badri in the north; Hasthāmalaka at the Sarada Mutt at Dwarka in the West and Sureswara at the Sarada Mutt at Sringeri in the South. Sri Sankara laid down that only pure, noble souls, learned in the scriptures and treading the path of devotion and knowledge should become heads of Sankara Mutts. They were to spread the message of *Advaita* and supervise the activities intended for the spiritual welfare of the people in their respective regions. When he knew that he had fulfilled his life's mission, he quietly withdrew from all activities and spent most of his time in meditation. One day, he blessed his disciples and set out alone on his last journey to Kedarnath where he entered *mahāsamādhi* in his thirty-second year. He is recognized as the greatest teacher of *Vedānta* after Veda Vyasa and it is mainly due to his efforts that *Advaita* is accepted to this day as the last word in world philosophy.

- *Harih Om Tat Sat*



# SĀDHANA PANCHAKAM

Sri Sankara's *Sādhana Panchakam*, as its name indicates, is a lovely lyric of five verses on spiritual discipline. It is more an *Upadesa* (teaching) than a treatise (*prākaranam*), for the theme as well as its treatment is alike simple and direct. This piece is considered as the very last among the *Achārya*'s works; but considering the benefit that spiritual seekers derive from it, *Sādhana Panchakam* can be considered as occupying the very first place. Its genesis, according to the legend is as follows:

The *Achārya* began to feel that he was coming to the end of his earthly sojourn and that he had fulfilled his life's mission. So, he became more and more withdrawn, taking no interest in teaching and training his disciples. The disciples also came to feel that their guardian and guide was getting ready to leave for his abode. One day, they approached their *Achārya* and, after offering their obeisance at his holy feet in deep devotion and humility, prayed to him, "Revered Master, you have done everything for the re-establishment of the *Vedic* religion on the firm foundation of reason and experience. But you have not dwelt at all on the spiritual discipline a seeker has to practise in order to realise the supreme truth of *Advaita*. Your words of advice in this matter will naturally be of the highest authority



and practical value to generations of spiritual aspirants in days to come".

The *Achārya* was much pleased to hear the prayer made by his disciples led by his first disciple, Padma-pādachārya. *Sādhana-Panchakam* was the master's advice to his disciples on that occasion on the subject of spiritual discipline. Its tone is intimate and gentle like that of a teacher taking the pupil's hand in his own and guiding him ever so carefully to reach the goal. The poem is known also by another significant name "*Sopāna-Panchakam*". '*Sopānam*' means a staircase and this poem contains forty graded exercises much like the forty steps of a staircase. By making use of them, the spiritual aspirant can go up the staircase to reach the tower of liberation. Let us now have a close look at the poem to see how the seeker is guided step by step up the ladder.

I    *Vedo nityam adheeyatām,  
tadutitam karma swanushtheeyatām*

*Tenesasya vidheeyatām apachitih,  
kāmye matih tyajyatām*

*Pāpaughah paridhooyatām,  
bhavasukhe dosho'nusandheeyatām*

*Âtmecchā vyavaseeyatām,  
nijagrihāt toornam vinirgamyatām*



**1. Nityam vedah adheeyatām - Learn the Veda(s) everyday, regularly**

The first spiritual exercise that Sri Sankara enjoins upon the seekers is, studying the Vedas everyday. By 'Veās', any scriptural text which contains religio-spiritual principles and teachings is meant here, and not the Vedas so-called. Studying it every day is insisted upon because a sound theoretical knowledge of any principle is an essential pre-requisite for its practical application in life, particularly so in things spiritual. Therefore, regular studies of scriptures –anything from the *Upanishads* to the teachings of the modern masters- is laid down as the starting point of the seeker's spiritual journey. This is called '*swādhyāya-sādhana* or self-study, as a spiritual exercise. It is of primary importance because it stands for the living presence of the *guru* and his guidance.

**2. Tadutitam karma swanushtheeyatām - Perform well the work laid down in it.**

The work prescribed and sanctioned by the *Vedas* is one's own duty- *swadharma* - which varies according to the tendencies inherent in each individual as also the circumstances in which each one finds himself or herself. Yet, there are a few duties common to all, and they are *yajna*, *daana*, and *tapas* which are to be performed by all under all circumstances. Fearing that work brings about attachment and bondage, they are not to



be abandoned. Performance of this three-fold duty purifies the minds of even men of discrimination. This is the firm view of Lord Krishna expressed in *The Gita* (XVIII-5) which has the force of a divine injunction.

*Yajna* means work done for the good of the people without as much as a thought of the fruit which the performance of the duty yields. *Dāna* is food or clothes or medicine given freely to the poor and the needy in order to bring relief to them from their pain or suffering. *Tapas* is the constant effort to restrain the senses and the mind lawlessly wandering towards an infinity of sense - pleasures. In short, it is trying to live a life of restraint and moderation in which one hopes to get a glimpse of peace and happiness.

Even these duties are to be performed with single-minded devotion and not just mechanically. No work, much less one's duty, is to be done for the sake of name or fame, power or pelf. Work is to purify the mind, to free it from impurities, desires and attachments. It is in this spirit that the three-fold duty has to be done: "this is my firm and certain conviction", says Lord Krishna in the next verse of *The Gita* (XVIII-6). The only purpose of work is purification of the mind by exhausting the existing work-tendencies and preventing new ones from entering the mind. Without the attainment of mental purity, there can be little progress in the path of spirituality. The word,



*swanushttheeyatām* refers to this right attitude in the performance of one's duties.

3. *Tena eesasya apachitih vidheeyatām*- Offer it ( the three-fold duty ) as your offering, worship to God.

The only way for us to become pure at heart is to do our duty unattached, with a free mind, like a master and not like a servant or slave. The best and the easiest method of developing the proper attitude to work is to look upon 'work as worship' (to the God in man). Dedicating all actions and their fruits to God is true worship. That is '*karma yoga*' or '*Bhāgawata-dharma*', the spiritual discipline that makes us pure-hearted. What else is worship of God other than wholeheartedly offering the best things we have at His feet for His grace and blessings and for no earthly rewards? It should be the endeavour of every earnest seeker to offer all his activities at the feet of God with a mind free of all desires but full of devotion. The reward will be God's grace or His *prasādam* in the form of purity and peace of mind-*manah prasādam*. If we dedicate every act of ours to God, our life itself gets transformed as a sustained worship of God. That is why religious texts and teachers alike attach the greatest importance to this discipline of performing our duties as worship of God.



**4 *Kāmyae matih tyajyatām* – Give up the desire for sense-pleasures.**

It is most likely that when we perform our duties in the spirit of 'work as worship', we will begin to feel peace of mind in an ever-increasing measure. Peace of mind is sure to be accompanied by a kind of joy far more satisfying than sense-pleasures. When this happens, we will naturally give up our desire for sense pleasures - and the mind will begin to dwell more and more on God. Indeed, we will feel joy only in the thought of God and work done as worship to Him. *Mukundamāla* describes this state of the mind in these words, "I know of no joy comparable to the nectar-sweet joy that I get when I meditate on the holy feet of Lord Vishnu". When we attain this state of mental purity and peace, we do not have to drive away the desire for sense-pleasures. Such impure thoughts will leave our minds of their own accord finding that they are no longer welcome there.

**5. *Papaughah paridhooyatām*- Keep away all (crowds of) sins.**

By sin or sinful act is meant work which leads us away from the goal of life and paves the way for grief and pain. It is unending desire for sense-pleasures that prompts us to do sinful acts. No one can end desires by gratification. In fact, it only increases desires even as pouring ghee into the fire helps the flames to leap up instead of putting it out. If we fondle and feed



desires with sense objects, we will have to suffer increasing misery. Besides, we go down to the level of an animal's life of indiscriminate sensuality. When we become aware of the nature of desires and their influence on us, we will begin to shun desires and thus keep away from doing sinful acts. Driving away the desire for sense-pleasures from the mind is an important spiritual exercise.

**6. Bhavasukhe doshah anu-sandheeyatām** – Think always of the pain and grief inherent in worldly pleasures.

This discipline tells us how we can escape from sinful acts and their consequence of sorrow. If we can wake up from the delusion that it is the sense-objects which give us happiness, escape from sorrow becomes easy. It is our magnificent obsession that the source of all pleasures in life is this or that sense-object, though wisdom points to the contrary. Great teachers of spirituality like Lord Krishna, Vyāsa and Sankara are unanimous in their opinion that the world itself is impermanent and therefore the abode of sorrow. We run after worldly pleasures like the foolish deer going deeper into the desert to quench its thirst by drinking 'mirage-water'. It is enough that we think there is pleasure in an object and the mind rushes out madly to possess it. This discipline tells us how to rein in the mind by exercising discrimination, the faculty given only to human beings. It is not very difficult for anyone



of average intelligence to come to the conclusion that happiness is an internal condition, a state of the mind. It is not to be found in external objects at all, for no object gives the same measure of happiness to all at all times. In fact what one relishes heartily is disliked intensely by another. Normally, we like to listen to music; but can we relish it when we are afflicted by disease, infamy or such calamity? The defect is not in music but in us, in the changed condition of the mind. Happiness is not objective but subjective — in ourselves. But like the musk deer unable to know that the scent spreads from its own body, we fail to find happiness in ourselves but seek it everywhere except where it is. The only way to enjoy happiness is by coming to discover the truth that sense-objects can yield only unhappiness. We have to wake up from the fascinating illusion that the objects of the world can make us happy.

**7. *Âtmechhaa vyavaseeyatām*** – Nourish the yearning for Self-realisation.

When the mind comes to know that the sense-objects can give only sorrow and never even an iota of happiness, its only choice is to make a wise retreat from the sense-objects where it has been wandering for happiness in vain. And then, its only place of retreat is the Self (*ātma*) which is of the nature of eternal happiness. The Self (one's own Self) is the source of all happiness and the object of all love and it is for the sake of oneself that all



else becomes loveable and enjoyable. Only when one is convinced that happiness is available only from within oneself, one will give up the search for it without and begin to turn the searchlight within. In short, the journey from sense-pleasures to the joy of the Self is long and arduous. But once we come to taste a drop of the nectar-sweet bliss of the Self, we will unhesitatingly shun and flee from all sense pleasures. Till that state of the mind is reached, we will have to practise avoiding sense-pleasures and yearning for Self - realisation.

**8. *Nija grhāt toornam vinir-gamyataam-*** Get out of one's home forthwith.

It is the *Vedic* injunction that one should quit one's home the moment one is disenchanted with it. If one hesitates, one is sure to be dragged back into the prison-house of home by the enemy-army — one's friends and relations, wealth, position and so on. It is very hard to rise above desires and attachments; but nothing is easier than falling into that trap. So, those who seek liberation have to cut asunder the knots of home, family, relations and so on at all costs. The unattached and the free are the real hero-souls who attain life-fulfilment. This can be explained in another way- -in a less rigid and more acceptable way. The argument is that what we have to quit and avoid is not so much our home or wealth or relations as our attachment to them. It is pointed out that the home of a householder of discrimination and detachment is as pure and holy as a 9.



hermitage. Conversely, even when one whose mind is not free from attachment were to go on a pilgrimage or sit in meditation in a Himalayan cave, it will be an empty, futile exercise!

This can be met with the counter-argument that no man of strong dispassion will consider it worth his while to stay on at home surrounded by friends and relations. If a householder's life were as good as a rununciant's, then the more advanced stations of life like *vānaprastha* (hermitage) and *sanyāsa* (renunciation) will be found redundant. Moreover, it is to be borne in mind that these disciplines are meant for genuine spiritual seekers and not for those who somehow want to cling on to the life of a householder. For such sincere spiritual aspirants, this latter explanation with its concessions and compromises will be wholly unacceptable as defeating the very purpose of spiritual discipline.

- II. *Sangah satsu vidheeyatām,*  
*Bhagavato bhaktih drdhā dheeyatām*
- Sāntyādih paricheeyatām,*  
*drdhataram karmāsu santyajyatām*
- Sad-vidwān upasarpyātām,*  
*pratidinam tadādauke sevyatām*
- Brahmaikāksharam arthyatām*  
*sruti - sirovākyam samākarnyatām*



*Sangah satsu vidheeyatām* - Live in holy company.

It is the habit of the mind to go in search of happiness and to stay stuck in the object which yields it. When it returns from sense - objects disillusioned, it discovers that to live in holy company is like getting into a mart of joy. So, the mind decides to stay on in the company of holy men never to leave it. Holy men are good and godly people who are intoxicated with joy that infects those who come into contact with them with what they feel – overflowing divine bliss. Enough if we are fortunate to fall into their company and become worthy of their grace and blessings, our spiritual progress is assured. The place assigned to holy company in the scheme of spiritual discipline is unique, for it strengthens our devotion to God and leads us to the door of liberation. Holy company solves half the problem of the aspirant and no real progress can be made without its helping hand. Even sinners have become great saints helped by the powerful influence of holy company. It weans them from worldliness to Godliness as nothing else does when they fall within the ambit of its beneficence and blessedness.

Holy men by their mere presence can transform the lives of the worldly-minded soaked in sorrow and pain into an experience of ineffable joy and peace. They are so merciful and compassionate that any person, be he a sinner, a weakling or an ignoramus, approaching them for their blessings, is sure to



become a true devotee of God in good time. Therefore, they are rightly described as giant spiritual magnets or philosopher's stones or the *Malaya* breeze which blows all plants into sandalwood trees. Lives of Sages Narada and Valmiki as well as of child - devotees like Prahlada and Dhruva bear ample testimony to the greatness of holy men and the efficacy of holy company. World teachers like Vyāsa, Sankarā, Nārada and others speak with one voice in pointing out that there is nothing like holy company in the whole scheme of spiritual discipline and that no progress can be achieved in spiritual journey by anyone without its support.

**10. *Bhagavatah bhaktih drdhā dheeyatām*** – By this, make devotion to God strong and firm.

Constant companionship with holy men, it is pointed out here, results in one's devotion to God becoming strong and firm. It may not be as easy or certain as in the case of evil company breeding bad habits like alcoholism or drug addiction. However, godly men have the power to create in us an interest in God and acts of devotion to God. Holy men alone can kindle in us the essential pre-requisite-faith in God, in the words of the teacher and in the scriptures. Holy company creates the proper atmosphere congenial to the deepening of devotion to God. Holy men spend their time in glorifying God and meditating on Him. They live and move and have their being



in God, engulfed by the waves of divine bliss. It is difficult for one living in the company of such God-intoxicated men not to be affected by their deep devotion to God. Much like a child learning a particular language by living with the people speaking that language, one living with holy men comes to have faith in God and his devotion strengthened.

**11. *Sāntyadih paricheeyatām*** – Practice virtues like *sānti*, *dānti* etc.

This exercise is to restrain the lawless wandering of the senses and the mind and to acquire some degree of self control which is an important step forward in our spiritual journey. As long as we have desires in us, our senses and the mind will be in a state of agitation. They have to be looked upon as powerful enemies urging us to sinful acts and to the experience of sorrow and pain. This discipline enables us to feel a measure of inner joy even in the absence of enjoying sense pleasures. However, it requires constant introspection and practice.

**12. *Drdhataram karma āsu santyajyatām*** – Give up forthwith all actions which bind us.

Worldly actions of all kinds without exception create bondage and so are to be given up forthwith. It may be urged that for a spiritual aspirant, the only work sanctioned by the scriptures is one's duty — work as worship. But some aspirants



might still feel that they have some duties towards their parents and teachers etc., by virtue of their birth and growth as members of a family or society. This feeling of “unfinished duties” is sure to drag them to the field of action, attachment and suffering (bondage). He who has given up hearth and home, family and friends for the sake of God, has no duties towards anyone. In fact, his only duty is to give up this “duty consciousness” which is an obstacle in the path of his spiritual progress. The less he is attached to work, the more spiritually advanced he becomes because he begins to feel increasing freedom from the dead-weight of desire and bondage.

13. *Sad-vidwān upasarpyatāam* – Approach a spiritual master.

When the aspirant reaches this level of progress, that is to say, that he does not have to depend on anyone for anything, nor has he any duty or obligation towards anyone, he becomes a true seeker of knowledge. His only concern in life is spiritual enlightenment for which he has to get the guidance from a spiritual master who is well-versed in the scriptures and profoundly centered in God-consciousness. Besides, the guide or *Guru* has to be compassionate towards those who suffer from the pain and sorrow of worldliness. The aspirant approaches such a *guru* in deep humility and earnestness of purpose. Knowledge of the Self or God-realisation cannot be attained



without the help and guidance of a *guru* or a spiritual master who has attained enlightenment. Such a teacher alone is able to take us safely across the shoreless ocean of *samsāra*, of birth and death.

**14. *Tad-pāduke prati-dinam sevyatām*** – Worship his sandals (serve him) at all times.

Service to the *guru* is the indication of the seeker's readiness for prolonged and painstaking effort to reach the goal as directed by the master. The *guru* needs no service of any kind from anyone. But the devotion and dedication with which the seeker serves the *guru* is a pointer that he is a worthy seeker, worthy of the *guru's* grace and blessings. Such a seeker alone attains spiritual enlightenment. Mere learning or hard penance in the absence of devotion to the *guru* is futile. Conversely, with the grace and blessings of the *guru* secured by faithful service to him, the disciple reaches the goal. This shows that devoted service to the *guru* is the seeker's supreme duty.

**15. *Ekāksharam Brahma arthyatām*** – Pray for the imperishable *Brahman* symbolised by the sacred syllable, *Aum*.

Having received the grace of the compassionate *guru*, what is it that the disciple has to pray for? Naturally it is for liberation from the misery of worldliness, the only boon that he wants and his *guru* can grant. The state of liberation is the



same as God (Self) realisation or the state of *Brahmic* consciousness. The *guru* can teach the disciple the nature of the Self (God or *Brahman*) and how to reach and realise it. The disciple of mature understanding has use for nothing else, like supernatural powers or heavenly life, for they too are within the domain of *Māya* from which he wants to escape. He neither asks for such paltry gains, nor will the *guru* grant them to his beloved disciple. They are interested in the glory and grandeur of God (Self) realisation which is the same as the blissful experience of *Brahmic* consciousness.

**16. *Sruti-siro-vākyam samākarnyatām*** – Attentively listen to the meaning of the great *Vedāntic* declarations.

The goal of all seekers is to get the knowledge of the Self contained in the *Sruti* or the *Vedas*. It says that the Self is the only reality of which the individual soul and the universe are but appearances. The self-same, non-dual Self is the indweller in every living being — man, bird and beast, plants, trees, grass and creepers. It is also the intrinsic integrality of the entire universe. So then, to know the Self, we do not have to make the search 'without' but to turn 'within', for the Self is not an object outside of ourselves but the very stuff of our own being. Self-realisation is not something far forth but our own nature, ourselves. This is the quintessence of the *Vedās* or *Vedāntic* wisdom contained in the *Sruti-siro-vākyam* or the *Mahavākyas*,



the four great *Upanishadic* declarations. That is not to say that the *guru* will begin to teach the disciple the meaning of these declarations straightaway from day one. He will lead the student gradually, according to his ability to grasp these great and subtle ideas, to the grand finale of philosophical wisdom. This knowledge is the summit and summation of all existence and experience.

Now then, let us see where the aspirant stands as he steps up the staircase of spiritual discipline. The journey to the goal of life is marked by four clearly graduated stations – *brahmacharya* (student's life), *gārhastya* (householder's), *vānaprastha* (hermit's) and *sanyāsa* (renunciant's life). The journey Godward thus begins with the student studying scriptural texts indicated in the opening exercise, *Vedo nityam adheeyatām*. The next six exercises ending with *Atmecchā vyavaseeyatām* deal with how the aspirant as an ideal householder must conduct himself. He performs his duties as worship to God which helps him earn purity of heart. This, in its turn, gives him the insight that wealth, progeny and such other worldly objects do not give him any abiding joy and peace. He finds out that freedom from attachment to worldly objects is the key to lasting happiness. So, he gives up the world without any ado, which is shown in the eighth exercise, *nija-grahāt....* at the end of stanza One.



It is the life of the hermit in the forest to which the aspirant now moves up, This is described in the first four exercises of the second stanza beginning with *sangah satsu* ..... The mind, disillusioned with worldly objects, now finds itself in the company of holy men where it finds real happiness. As his love for God and Godly acts gets stronger with every passing day, he finds out that greater fulfilment in life is felt not so much in action and the enjoyment of the fruit of action as in renouncing them. Action brings only attachment, bondage and suffering instead of freedom and joy. So, he forthwith renounces all actions that bind him and becomes a true *sanyāsi*, a renunciant, which is indicated by *Drdhataram karmāsu santyajyatām*.

From the thirteenth exercise to the very end of the poem, all the twenty eight exercises pertain to the disciplined life of the renunciant, long and razor sharp. Giving up the binding actions is only the negative aspect of the spiritual discipline. The positive aspect of it is made up of three distinct exercises — *sravana* (listening), *manana* (reasoning), *nididhyāsana* (contemplating). Knowledge of the Self is gained by listening to the *guru*, the spiritual master, testing its validity by reasoning and finally by experiencing it by means of contemplation. So then, the renunciant approaches a master, serves him, wins his grace and prays for teaching him the nature of the Self and how to realise it. The sixteenth exercise with



which the second stanza ends, *sruti-siro-vākyam*.... speaks of the *sravana-sādhana*, the discipline of listening to the *Guru*. *Manana* and *nididhyāsana* are to follow and the twenty-four exercises contained in the remaining three stanzas deal with them.

**III**     *Vākyārthascha vichāryatām*  
*srutisirah pakshah samāsreeyatām*

*Dustarkāt suviramyaām,*  
*srutimatas – tark' nusandheeyatām*

*Brahmāsmēti vibhāvyatām,*  
*aharahah garvah parityajyatām*

*Deh'ham matirunjhyatām,*  
*budhajanaivādah parityajyatām*

**17. Vākyārthascha vichāryatām** – Reason out the meaning of the *Vedantic* declarations (*mahāvākyās*).

The *mahāvākyas* or *Vedantic* declarations are aphoristic in style, and therefore, their meaning will not be readily available without deep and long reasoning, balanced with our own experience. If we do not ponder over the teachings of the *guru*, they will remain the ideas of the *guru* and not ours. Like the solid food we eat, the difficult ideas in the teachings have to be properly chewed, digested and absorbed. Reasoning is for easy digestion of the meaning of the *mahāvākyās*. Undigested by



absorption of *Vedantic* thoughts and ideas will do more harm than good. It is to avoid this pitfall that reasoning is presented as an exercise to follow listening. This will not affect the disciple's devotion and faith in the *guru* in any way. In fact, he will only be pleased that the disciple is using his powers of discrimination instead of blindly accepting whatever the *guru* says. Lord Krishna pointedly tells Arjuna to reason out the truth of whatever He had taught and then decide one way or the other in the light of his conviction. No teacher of *Vedanta* will be pleased if his disciple were to accept his words untested on the touchstone of reasoning and experience.

**18. *Sruti-sirah pakshah samāsreeyatām*** – Follow the *Vedantic* way of enquiry.

Science, be it physical or spiritual, is essentially a search for truth. However, the methodology of one science might be found unsuitable for another. For *Vedanta* the traditionally accepted way of enquiry is discriminating between the real Self and the unreal non-Self. This is the time-honoured method by which generations of seekers have come to discover the truth. This rewarding method is the one authentic and authoritative path open before a spiritual seeker. One doubts and disowns it at one's own peril even as one rejects the expert advice of an experienced doctor, engineer or lawyer. The seven exercises listed till the end of the verse underline the myself—



importance of following the *Vedantic* method of enquiry. Departure from it will be an exercise in futility leading the seeker to a blind alley.

19. *Dustarkāt suviramyatām* – Steer clear of specious or pointless disputations.

20. *Sruti-matah tarkah anusandheeyatām* – Let the arguments be in conformity with the *Vedantic* method of enquiry.

(19.) These two exercises are the continuation of the previous one dealing with how the reasoning has to be conducted. They point out the do's and don'ts of reasoning.. *Vedantic* declarations are the records of the experiences of the ancient seers who had the direct perception of truth in the state of *samādhi*. The simple, straight-forward duty of the seeker of truth is to follow them and discover the truth himself. Reasoning is for comprehending truth intellectually and not to defeat an adversary in debate. "I do not say that my stand is correct but yours is certainly wrong" is one typical example of fallacious argument. "Vyasa and Sankara are just in their observations which I am inclined to believe. But then, they run counter to the views of modern psychologists" is another!

(20) To doubt and deny *Vedantic* wisdom in this way and then to continue seeking it, is not only an unscientific



approach but also an act of self-deception. One who has no faith in the wisdom of the seers or the words of the *guru* cannot hope to see the light of truth. He is no true seeker but one condemned to grope in darkness. He is an object of pity, for he refuses to be guided by the *guru* along the path that has led many thirsty souls across the sea of pain and sorrow to the shore of liberation. If abiding happiness and peace is the goal to reach and not the trifling gains of a scholarly disputant, the only choice open to the spiritual seeker is to follow the time-tested and fruitful *Vedantic* method of enquiry.

**21. *Brahmāsmēti vibhāvyaṭām*** – Constantly think and feel “I am *Brahmam*”, (the Supreme).

**22. *Aharahā garvā parityajyaṭām*** – Throw out the ego-sense whenever it creeps into the mind.

**23. *Deho’ham matih unjhyatām*** – Give up the feeling, “I-am-the-body”.

(21). These three exercises deal with the positive and negative attitudes that a seeker has to adopt in order to reach the goal. The end and aim of all spiritual seeking is to attain *Self-Knowledge* or *perfect gnosis*. “Who am I?” is an old and awesome question. If I can discover my true nature and be steadfastly seated in it, I succeed in solving the entire mystery of life. I am shrouded by a good many things other than



those things that are mine, such as my body, my mind and so on. How can "I" be "my" shirt or shoes? Yet, we mix them up quite freely owing to an absurd delusion which causes us much sorrow. We have to wake up from this fascinating delusion and come to know our real nature. The truth of the matter is "I am *Brahman*", the Supreme—nothing else, nothing less.

But it is not enough to have just an intellectual comprehension of my true nature. I must experience it, feel that 'I am *Brahman*' in every pore of my being. And how to go about it? It is by developing and strengthening the positive attitude that 'I am *Brahman*', by strongly affirming this thought and feeling all through the waking hours. We are rich or poor, high or low, healthy or otherwise only because we think and feel and firmly affirm it that way. The same applies to an experiential understanding of our true nature. In truth, we are *Brahman*; our nature, our essentiality is nothing short of or other than divinity. This is the positive aspect of reasoning which borders on contemplation. Practising it constantly and for long will result in our identification with *Brahman*, the Supreme, as clearly and strongly as we feel that we are the body, the mind etc. Once we have this experience, we are liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

(22) The ego-sense or 'I' - ness is like the skin of the body which is very hard to get rid of but which is the root cause of all misery. It is the sense of separateness from our true



nature, divinity. It usually assumes the form, 'I am the Lord of the Universe; no one can equal much less excel me'. It can also take the apparently harmless form, 'I am God's own, His dearest devotee; I am the well-beloved, favourite disciple of my *guru*' and so on. Even this ripe ego-sense veils our selfhood, our divinity and so this 'I'-ness also has to be given up without any ado. Ego-sense in any form is alien to us, a foreign matter super-imposed on our true nature. It is like a particle of dust got into our eyes or nostrils which irritates us till it is removed by rubbing or sneezing. Our pain and grief will continue to harass us till the foreign matter of the ego-sense super-imposed on our *Brahman*-hood is expurgated at all costs. The ego-sense buoys up owing to Self-forgetfulness caused by ignorance. We are advised to throw out the ego-sense whenever it creeps into our mind—which is always! This is the negative aspect of the discipline of reasoning.

(23) The first shoot that sprouts from the seed of Self-forgetfulness is the ego-sense that invariably takes the form, 'I am the body'. But the ever pure, ever-free Self of the nature of bliss can never be the utterly impure body which is heir to limitations of every kind and subject to pain and misery. This wrong identification cannot be but by the superimposition of the non-Self. Only a man of deluded intellect can think and feel that he is the body when it is quite obvious that his is the body where he dwells for a brief hour. How can this bundle of



skins and bones, a bag of filthy things like flesh and blood be an object of love? Who else but a fool will find joy in such a hateful object? It is ignorance that makes me look at my inert body as myself of the nature of consciousness and bliss. The seeker of truth has to throw out this deep-rooted error in thought and feeling at all costs. This exercise also points out the negative aspect in reasoning. Both the positive and negative attitudes are to be made use of in reasoning so that the Self can be retained after the rejection of the non-Self.

**24. *Budhaajanaih vādah parityajyatām*** – Give up arguing with the wise.

A seeker of truth is not likely to feel egoistic on the ground that he is rich or aristocratic. But he cannot be free from the other equally harmful form of egoism, namely, that he is a scholar well-versed in the scriptures. This is most likely to urge him on to a disputation with a wise man before whom he has to be humble. Only small men will parade their scholarship before the wise. For a seeker of truth, book learning and disputation are of little value in assisting him to reach the goal of Self-realisation. Before a wise man, a God-like person worthy of our veneration, it is not only an act of indiscretion but one of grave affront, like challenging a king in his own court. Therefore, the seeker has to consciously put a check on his tendency to argue with men of realisation. All the eight disciplines in the



verse are an enumeration of the do-s and don't-s enjoined upon the spiritual seeker in his *manana-sādhana*. With reference to his behavioural pattern and his responses to the inner urges and the environment without, the positive and negative methods of discipline are given in the next verse.

IV    *Kshud-vyādischa chikitsyatām,  
pratidinam bhikshaushadham bhujiyatām  
swādvannam na tu yāchyatām,  
vidhivasaat praaptena santushyataam  
Seetoshnaadi vishahyataam,  
na tu vridhā vākyam samucchaaryataam  
Audaaseenyaam abheepsayataam,  
jana-kripaa-naishthuryam Utsrjyataam*

25. *Kshud-vyaadhischa chikitsyataam* – Treat the illness called hunger.

26. *Pratidinam bhikshaushadham bhujiyataam* – Eat the alms-food (food got by begging) everyday.

27. *Swaadvannam na tu yaachyataam* – Do not beg tasty food.

28. *Vidhivasaat praaptena santushyataam* – Be happy



and satisfied with what chance or fate brings.

(25 to 28) These four disciplines lay down the simple rules which a renunciant has to follow in his food habits. As the fittest instrument for Self - realisation, the body has to be preserved in a healthy condition. The renunciant is free to eat such food as to keep his body in health and to satisfy his hunger. Eating food should not be for pampering the body or the sense of taste. However, we are seldom, if ever, satisfied with a simple meal that satisfies our hunger. We over-eat so much that with our stomach in danger of bursting at the seams, we can hardly breathe freely! Obviously this is not only unnecessary but even harmful to health. The rule book of health says that one who is 'moderate and restrained' in one's food habits stays healthy. 'Moderate and restrained' means eating food once a day, filling half the stomach with solid food and leaving the other half for water and air. Eating food more than once a day is the way to sense-gratification and illness. The renunciant is to be satisfied with eating a limited quantity of food once a day.

It will be easy for one to practise 'moderate and restrained' food habits if one develops the attitude that hunger is a disease and that food is its remedy. Taking medicine is not to fill the stomach but to cure the patient of illness. A meal a day is enough to keep the body in perfect health. For the renunciant, food got by begging is the prescribed medicine for the illness of



hunger. Lord Krishna advises Uddhava that it is the duty of a monk to beg food in order to keep the soul and soil together (Bhāg: 1-18, 34). He begs food at a few doors and receives food in the hollow of his palm, which is like the bee collecting honey from flowers, and so this is called *madhukari*. A monk should never demand or even desire delicious food, for it shows that he is a slave to the sense of taste. Veda-Vyāsa says that he who masters the sense of taste, masters all the five senses — *jitam sarvam jite rase*. In short, the renunciant must gain mastery over the powerful senses at all costs.

Whatever we enjoy or suffer is the fruit of our own past actions. Whatever is determined by our past actions will perforce reach us, whether we try for it or not. Conversely, what is not destined cannot be ours, “rough-hew it how *we* will”. We get what we deserve and not what we desire. Since this is the inviolable law of *karma*, it behoves the monk to be satisfied with what he gets without effort. Time and energy are not to be spent on the unavailing effort for procuring food or gratifying sense-pleasures but for reaching the goal of Self-realisation. *Sreemad-Bhagavatam* describes the behaviour of the python as worthy of emulation by a renunciant in the getting food without seeking it! It lies somewhere and catches the prey that goes near it. It is indifferent to the size or taste of the prey it swallows as well as to how and when or what its next meal will be. After the meal, the python takes rest in great



contentment. Similar is to be the attitude of the renunciant in all matters. He must be above all likes and dislikes and be content with whatever reaches him.

29. *Seetoshnādi vishahyatām* – Endure heat and cold etc.

30. *Na tu, vrdha-vaakyam samuceārytām* - But, utter no word of criticism or complaint.

31. *Audāseenyam abheepsyatām* – Cultivate the attitude of indifference (of a witness) .

(29) This discipline tells us how an aspirant who enters the station of life of a monk should react to unfavourable situations. Life can be seen as an endless flow of experiences in the form of pairs of opposites such as hot and cold, pleasure and pain, honour and dis-honour etc. This eternal change is the unchanging characteristic of life which no one can stop or avoid. Of these, hot and cold conditions affect the body, pleasure and pain influence the mind and honour and dishonour touch the ego-sense. However, because of their transient nature, it is easy to endure them; they will leave us of their own accord.

(30) These pairs of opposites cannot be prevented from becoming part and parcel of our life. We have to learn to live with them cheerfully, exhorts *The Gita*. They are not only transient but also relative. The thought that winter will soon be followed by welcome seasons makes unfavourable situations



not only endurable but even enjoyable. Moreover, complaints and criticism will just be unavailing against the fixed laws of nature. Yet it is our habit to complain loudly against anything that is unwelcome to us. A renunciant should carefully avoid such thoughtless behaviour which has the only result of further agitating the already agitated mind. He is to earn the ability to reconcile himself to any situation in life. It is this equilibrium and calmness of mind in life experience that is to be the fruit of a renunciant's spiritual discipline.

(31) He is a hero-soul who knows the nature of the pairs of opposites and rises above them. That state of the mind which nothing can disturb is best described as the attitude of indifference in which there is nothing negative. No doubt, it is withdrawal from the din and bustle, the tug-of-war of emotions and feelings. One watching them as a witness without participating in them becomes a participant in the ampler and purer experience of the soul's joy. This is the goal of the spiritual aspirant, the state of the mind at rest undisturbed by the rise and fall of the pairs of opposites. It is a whole heaven above the lower value-system and way of life. Such a person, says the *Gita*, inherits the *Brahmic* or divine state of being.

32. *Jana-kripaa-naish thuryam utsrjyatām* – Be



aloof from both the kindness and cruelty shown by the public.

A spiritual aspirant will do well to attach no importance to what the common people say or do. It is best to stand loftily aloof from them or discreetly withdraw from all dealings with them. Self-interest is the driving power behind all their actions and never any noble motive. According to whether they stand to gain or lose, they behave towards some with kindness and some others with cruelty, now in a soft manner and very harshly the next moment. No serious-minded person will take them seriously, for social well-being is farthest from their thought. What indeed will be the state of affairs if a scientist, a poet or a philosopher were to listen to populist opinion! In any case, a seeker of God is to anchor himself to his own pursuit with steadfast devotion, if he is to reach the goal. The ancient *Rishis* were able to discover truth because they moved forward with 'there being no populāce to please or critics to appease', as Max Muller puts it. A spiritual aspirant is to influence the people and not the other way about. The safest procedure is to be indifferent to the ways of the world, that is to say, to be fully awake to the goal of realizing *Brahman*.

V *Ekānte sukhamāsyatām  
paratare Ćetah samādheeyatām*

*Poornātmā susameekshyatām,  
jagadidam tadbādhitam drsyatām,  
Prāk-karma pravilāpyatām,  
Çitibalāt nāpyuttaraih slishyatām  
Prārabdham tviha bhujiyatām  
atha parabrahmātmanā stheeyatām.*

33. *Ekante sukham āsyatam* – Be happy living in solitude.

This verse deals with the discipline of contemplation following the discipline of discrimination. It describes how a renunciant should control the senses and conduct himself in the world. It also describes the experience of *Brahman*. The first condition for contemplation on *Brahman* is the ability of the seeker to feel at ease when alone and away from 'the madding crowd' of friends and relations and not when the mind is busy flitting from one worldly object to another. Both within the mind and without, the seeker is to feel a sense of joy in the stillness and silence of solitude. The contemplation of the alone on the Alone can be only in an atmosphere of calm and peace. Where can one find a quiet place these days when even the uninhabited, hilly areas are becoming townships? The spiritual aspirant can make use of the long, undisturbed hours of the night for meditation when all enjoy deep sleep. Ordinary people find it difficult to remain at peace with themselves in a lonely



place without company. But the spiritual aspirant finds joy in solitude when he silently communes with his own soul. It is company that disturbs his peace and joy. He feels that he is not alone when alone and that he is company enough even when left alone. Prayer or chanting His names or singing songs in praise of Him can be a collective effort. But contemplation on God has to be done singly, unnoticed and unadvertised. It can be said that if one feels joy contemplating on God in solitude, one is spirituality progressing towards fruitfulness in realizing the Supreme.

**34. *Paratare Çetah samādheeyatām*** - Fix the mind on the Supreme (Self).

For the beginner, it will be difficult to keep off worldly thoughts from the mind. But for the aspirant who has successfully completed the earlier exercises of listening to the words of the *guru* explaining the *mahāvākyās* and discriminatively thinking on them, concentration of the mind and contemplation on the Self will become progressively natural, easy and enjoyable. In fact, the difficulty is to return to worldly thoughts which produce pain and grief. The spiritual aspirant will gradually but surely attain the state of mind of the *yogārōdha* described in the *Gita* – the mind, steady and unwavering, like the flame of a lamp in a windless place burning brightly without ever flickering. The

mind of the meditator will dwell constantly on the Self with effortless ease as the mind is free from all disturbing thoughts and imaginings about the world. This lofty state is attained as result of long and continuous effort on the part of the meditator in withdrawing the mind from the objects of the world and fixing it on the Self.

**35. *Poornātma susameekshyatām*** – Behold the all-pervasive Self.

**36. *Idam jagat tad-bādhitam drsyatām*** - See the world as enveloped and subsumed by It.

(35) For the worldly, the objective world alone is, and therefore, that alone is real to them. On the contrary, for the spiritual aspirant who is very near the end of his quest, the Self alone is and so, he cannot see anything other than his own Self. Both the *Gita* and the *PanÇadasi* describe how clear and bright is the vision of the Self—‘the effulgence of a thousand suns’; ‘the self-effulgent sun of consciousness that has no rising or setting’. The vision of the Self is never hazy or fitful as we think of it now, but that it surpasses the splendour of several suns drowning everything in its blinding brightness. In fact, the Self alone is which lends light and life to everything in the universe. This is the vision of Self-realisation.

(36) If so, what about the intimate world-experience we have had till now? That necessarily is enveloped and subsumed



by the all-pervasive effulgence of the Self. Consequently it becomes unreal, a mere shadow of a non-existent entity! It is like the dream - world getting submerged in the wakeful state. Similarly, the world of sense-objects is a dream-world projected by ignorance. When we wake up to the vision of the Self, this objective universe will be subsumed by the effulgence of the Self which remains the only reality.

Self-realisation is the experience that I, the Self alone is and that nothing else is or can be in the three tenses of time or during the three states of consciousness. The world of names and forms is nothing but the phenomenon superimposed on the Self, like the snake on the rope or the mirage on the desert. The grandeur of this experience is to have the feeling, that I, the Self is the Self in all the beings of the entire universe. Till now, I was a finite object, a speck of dust in the vast universe; but now, I begin to feel that the whole universe is just a tiny particle in me, the Infinite. My dimension has become the all-ness, the whole-ness and the always-ness of all existence and experience. I am the full ocean of consciousness and worlds of experience are waves that rise and fall in me without producing any change in my fulness and infinitude. This state of attainment, this exalted state of being now attained by the liberated-in-life is the goal of all spiritual aspirants. Beyond this state of self-fulfilment, nothing

remains to be achieved.

**37. *Prāk-karma pravilāpyatām*** – Dissolve the accumulated work-tendencies.

**38. *Çiti-balāt nāpyuttaraih slishyatām*** - By virtue of the strength of mind, be not entangled in new work-tendencies.

**39. *Tu iha prārabdham bhujiyatām*** – During this life-time, however, bear the consequences of the work-tendencies which have begun to yield fruit.

(37,38,39) These four directions describe the pure and unattached life of the liberated-in-life. He has already attained what is sought to be achieved by these disciplines. The liberated-in-life is untouched by ignorance or desire. Therefore, he has no action and attachment which produce pain and sorrow. He is free from all actions, past and future, and their consequences. To him, world-experience is unreal like a dream, for he has become the Self and no longer the finite being in bondage. As the Self (*Âtma*), he is untouched by work-tendencies of any kind which affect only the finite being (*Jiva*). The liberated-in-life does not have to account for the actions done by him as *jiva*, even as one who is in the wakeful state does not have to account for whatever he has done as the dreamer in the dream-state. The liberated, unaffected by the action done in the past by the *jiva* in ignorance, is in a state of absolute freedom.



But the question is often raised whether the knower of the Self is free from his *prārabdha-karma*, since he has a body and is subject to all that it is heir to. The retention of the body is proof of the existence of *prārabdha* even for the liberated-in-life. This sounds a very valid argument. But, it is met by pointing out that the liberated is not identified with the body, and therefore, he is not affected by whatever affects the body. He carries the body like a tree keeping a dry leaf on its trunk. 'The fire of knowledge reduces all actions to ashes' says the *Gita*. When a person having three wives dies, all his three wives become widows at the same time. Similarly, when a *jiva* dies to become the liberated-in-life, all his actions, present, past and future, are reduced to ashes. He moves about in the world carrying his *prārabdha-sareera* without any body-consciousness. Like a burnt-up rope retaining the form but unable to perform the function of a rope, the knower of the Self, carries a body; but he is not aware of it, much less identified with it. This is how he lives in the world with his *prārabdha*.

**40. *Atha Para-brahmātmanā stheeyatām-*** And then, be established in the 'I am the Supreme *Brahman*' consciousness.

What will be the state of the liberated-in-life? He knows and feels that his body like the world of names and forms is nothing but a dream-like illusion. He would be profoundly centered in the consciousness that he alone is and that all that he had experienced so far had been utterly delusory. In fact

nothing had ever happened; the Self alone was and still is without any modification. The Self, like the waveless ocean, is changeless and is the 'still centre of the turning world'. I am that Self, I am *Brahman*, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss absolute. To be firmly established in this state is liberation, liberation from finitude and imperfection. This is the final fulfilment and goal of life: evolution cannot go any further.

The spiritual journey which *Sādhana-Panchakam* describes begins from the study of the scriptures by the *brahmachari* or the student. Stepping up the ladder, he reaches the next stage of the *grhastha*, the householder who begins to practise what he has learnt. He performs his household duties as worship to God whereby he gets purity of heart. Soon he becomes disenchanted with the pleasures of the world and renounces his attachment to all worldly possessions and relationships. This marks his progress to *Vānaprastha*, a hermit's life in the forest where he spends his time in the holy company of the good and godly people. This results in his devotion to God getting deeper with every passing day which he spends in great joy.

Yet, the spiritual aspirant feels that his fund of joy is uncertain and insufficient which urges him to move further to reach the stage of *sanyāsa*, or total renunciation. This is the topmost rung of the ladder of spiritual discipline where the aspirant's only desire and duty is to listen to the *guru's* words



of wisdom explaining the *Upanishadic Mahāvakyās*, to critically examine their purport and to contemplate on the Self lovingly and long. In good time, he comes to experience that he (the Self) alone is, and that the finite 'I', the ego, as well as the world of names and forms is illusory and unreal like a dream. To be firmly established in the consciousness that 'I am *Brahman*, the Supreme' of the nature of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss absolute is the ultimate goal and fulfillment of human life.







## *Eka-Sloki :* **Vedanta in a nut-shell**

One can only marvel at the astonishing skill of the Sanskrit poets of bygone years in elaborating a simple theme to epic dimensions as easily as in condensing an epic into just one stanza or verse. For example, Sage Valmiki's grand epic, *The Ramayana* in six cantos and twenty-four thousand verses is an elaboration of Sage Narada's account of Sri Rama's life and personality given in a few words or verses. It is even more proper to see the epic as having grown from the poet's own expression of grief distilled into the celebrated verse, *mā nishāda* .... Similarly, Sage Veda-Vyasa's *Sreemad-Bhāgavatam*, containing eighteen thousand *granthās* or verses is the full-blown flower that has blossomed from the bud of *chatuh-slokee-Bhāgavatam*, the four-versed *Bhāgavatam*. Again, *The Bhagavad-Gita* is stretched into seven hundred verses from what Sri Krishna had time enough to speak to Prince Arjuna on the battle-field of Kurukshetra. Conversely, these three voluminous

tomes have been condensed to just one verse each---a tribute at once to the talent and skill of the master-poets and the wonderful poetic resilience of the Sanskrit language, seldom, if ever, found elsewhere in world literature.

Now, the literature that has grown around the philosophical doctrine of *Advaita-Vedanta* is indeed vast and varied. We have the *Prasthāna-trayam* - - the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Brahma-Sutras*— with Sri Sankara's commentaries on them, followed by several glosses and elucidations, besides innumerable independent studies on the self-same theme of *Advaita* in most of the major Indian languages. These works might well fill a whole library. The significant point is that the interest in the study of *Advaita*, far from showing signs of decline, is steadily on the increase. Yet, the essential teaching of *Vedanta*, dealt with in scholarly debates and learned studies, is brought out in half a verse - *Brahma satyam, jagat mithyâ jeevo Brahmaiva nâparah* -- *Brahman* is the truth while the world is unreal and the individual soul is none other than *Brahman* Itself!

Here, in *Eka-sloki*, Sri Sankara in a rationally convincing manner proves the truth of the *Vedantic* declaration given above. Probably, he has in mind a type of the present day - student who has neither the patience nor the perseverance to make a



systematic study of *Vedanta*. So, the teaching is given in just one verse, in a nutshell, so to say. However, the method of teaching employed here is the question-and-answer method, the oral tradition followed from the *Upanishadic* times. In fact, in *Eka-Sloki*, we find an example of the 'Vedantic catechism' in which the questions are asked by the teacher and the answers to them given by the student — a reversal of the traditional method. By using this method, the teacher also helps the student in properly discriminating between the real and the unreal — the real Self illuminating the unreal world of objects.

It can be seen that the *Ācharya* has admirably brought out in *Eka-Sloki* the central message of *Drk-drsya-viveka* (the perceiver-perceived distinction). This vast and varied universe can be classified into two — I, the perceiver and you, the perceived, or the Subject and the Object. Of these two, who is real and true, I, the perceiver and the subject, or you, the perceived and the object? That which exists independent of all else and remains unchanged at all times and under all conditions can be taken as real and true. One gains perfect knowledge only when the perceiver-perceived question is finally settled. Usually, we say, 'such and such a thing is true because I saw it, I heard it'. However, sensory perception alone is not enough proof of the truth of the object perceived. Let us examine it further with the help of an illustration.

An object that was lying at some distance appeared to me in dim light as the root of a tree. Looking at it from two different angles, I could see it as a rope and as a garland. But seeing it at close quarters, I knew that it was none of those things seen earlier but a snake lying still! Now, even when the object seen appeared differently at different times, I, the perceiver remained the same at all times. The perceived can be true under certain conditions, but the perceiver remains true always and under all conditions. Therefore, *Vedanta* declares that I, the perceiver am *Brahman* whereas you, the perceived are an illusion — *drk Brahma drsyam maye'ti* ... . It is this *Vedantic* truth that Sri Sankara puts succinctly in *Eka-Sloki*.

For an object to be recognised as real and true, two factors must come together: its existence and its cognisance. The objects of the universe are amenable to our sense-perception and are different from fascinating illusions like the mirage or horizon. But for them to be recognised as real and true, they must also have the ability to reveal themselves by an external light or by their own inherent luminosity. The mere existence of an object is not enough. We must also be aware of its existence. For example, our foot might strike against a stone or our head against a wall, not because the stone or the wall did not exist, but because we were not aware of the existence of either. There was no light to illumine those objects with the result that, in effect, they were unreal and non-existent to us.



So then, we affirm the world of objects because it exists, and more importantly, because we are aware of its existence as it is illumined by some light from within or without it. Obviously, the objects of the world are not self-luminous, for they are not seen at all times. It follows, therefore, that the most important question is: Which is the light that illumines the objects and helps us to see them and become aware of their existence? By means of the questions and answers between the teacher and the student in *Eka-Sloki*, Sri Sankara helps us to know the Light of lights by which everything becomes known. But first, let us see what *Eka-Sloki* looks like –

*Kim jyotis-tava, bhânumân-ahani mei,  
ratrau pradeepâdikam Syâdevam,  
ravi-deepa-darsana-vidhau kim jyotirâkhyâhi mâm  
Chakshuh, tasya nimeelanâdi-samaye kim,  
dheer-dhiyodarsane Kim,  
tatrâham-ato bhavân paramakam  
jyotis-tadasmi prabho*

The dialogue between the teacher and the student in *Eka-Sloki*, rendered into prose order, will read as follows. It is the teacher who begins by putting the questions to the student.

<b><i>Tava jyotih kim</i></b>	What is your light? (The light which show the objects of the world to you)
<b><i>Ahani mei bhânumân</i></b>	During day time, my light is the sun,
<b><i>Ratrau pradeepâdikam</i></b>	and during night time, it is the lamp, the torch and so on
<b><i>Evam syât</i></b>	Very well, so be it,
<b><i>Mâm âkhyâhi</i></b>	But, tell me
<b><i>Ravi-deepa-darsanavidhau</i></b>	What is the light that helps you see
<b><i>(tava) jyotih kim?</i></b>	the sun, the lamp, the torch etc?
<b><i>Chakshuh</i></b>	My eye(s) is the light
<b><i>Tasya nimeelanâdi-samaye kim</i></b>	What is the light that helps you see the objects when you shut your eyes (as in sleep)



<i>Dheeh</i>	It is the light of intelligence (that helps me to see dream objects and those of any imagination)
<i>Dhiyor-darsane kim?</i>	The light that shows your intelligence?
<i>Tatra aham</i>	Myself is the light that shows my intelligence
<i>Atah bhavân paramakam jyotih</i>	It follows therefore that you are the Supreme Light.
<i>Tad asmi, prabho</i>	Verily, that I am (I am the Light of lights,) O Master!

The study of *Eka-Sloki* reveals interestingly enough that an enquiry into the truth of the objective world takes us from the many (the sun, the lamp, the torch, the eyes etc) to the One (the Light of the Self) and again from the without (the sun, lamp and the torch) progressively to the within (my eyes, my intelligence and my own Self). It comes to the firm conclusion that the perceiver alone is the ultimate truth and that the perceived world of objects is a grand illusion.

Violently disagreeing with it, one might cry out, 'But I have seen it with my own eyes!', to which the calm rejoinder of the *Vedantin* would be, "You see everyday the rising and setting of the sun with your own eyes; but for all that, does the sun ever rise or set? It is illusory like dream-objects. But you, the perceiver is undoubtedly real and true".

"I" am the self-luminous Consciousness and all knowledge and experience rest in me, the Self. 'I' am the yardstick, the proof and validation of the existence of all. And since 'I' am self-existent, existing in my own right, there is no necessity for any proof or validation for my existence. In short, everything exists in my Self and shines in the light of my Self. If 'I' am not there, nothing can ever exist and the entire universe will be naught, a huge void. 'I' am the one that gives value to all values and only by knowing me, the Self, anything in the universe becomes known. Self-knowledge or the knowledge that 'I' am the eternal substratum of all existence and experience is perfect *gnosis*. Likewise, the Self is the source of all light, the supreme Light which lends its light to all luminous objects like the sun, the moon and the stars as well as to lesser lights like the fire in the lamp and the torch etc – *tasya bhâsâ sarvamidam bibhâti*.

Now, what is the benefit that one gains from this knowledge or experience? Immense is the gain. This little,



limited ego-sense gets lost and subsumed in the universal Self, like the wave lost in the sea to become the sea itself. The unreal individuality is swallowed up by the universality of the divine. One will no longer be subject to changes like birth and growth, decay and death. Nor will one be affected by feelings like pleasure, pain, hunger and thirst. In short, one will be eternally pure and perfect — liberated. It is only then that one comes to know that liberation is not for the individual but from the feeling of individuality. That state of bliss and beatitude is called 'the supreme abode of Vishnu'- *tad Vishnoh paramam padam*. Reaching that state of Self-realisation, one transcends all process and crosses 'the dolphin-torn, gong tormented sea' of pain and grief: *tarati sokam âtmavid*.







## **KARMA-YOGA : THE PATH OF ACTION**

All of us are seen engaged in work of one kind or another all through the waking hours as if goaded by a powerful inner force. Never can we remain inactive even for a moment. Idleness makes us restless and we begin to pant for action, much like the fish caught in a net and cast ashore. This is so because life itself is an unending exercise in action and the enjoyment (or suffering) of the fruit of action. Now, behind every piece of work, there is to be found a purpose – the thought of a gain, big or small in the form of the fruit of action. This is what drives one and all into the vortex of action all through life. And since our actions are varied, their fruits also will be varied. Yet, behind all our varied actions and their fruits, there is one gain, one goal common to all actions – happiness.

It is to increase our fund of joy that we undertake to do an ever-increasing volume of work. But does our experience match our expectation of increased happiness? Ironically enough, an increase in work brings in only a corresponding

increase in pain and sorrow. Drawn by the mirage, a thirsty deer goes deeper and deeper into the desert only to die there owing to unbearable fatigue. It dies unable to quench its thirst, for there is no water in the desert, only its appearance. Similar is our predicament of going deeper into the field of action in expectation of greater happiness. The truth of the matter is that there is no happiness in action or in the fruit of action. Happiness is essentially a state of the mind, an internal condition. However, this is the dilemma we face: We cannot avoid doing work and more work in the hope of getting an ever-increasing measure of happiness; but what we get is an increase in misery. How can we get away from this fascinating illusion, this contrary experience?

The way out is *Karma-Yoga* or right action. It is work done in the right spirit by properly understanding the nature of work. In other words, it is a correction and continuation of work for overcoming the ill-effects of work. It is doing work without any thought of the fruit of work. In any case, we cannot run away from work, for we will be compelled to do work as long as work-tendencies remain in us. And they can be exhausted only through work. It is through ill-health that we have to struggle till we regain our health. The medicine that the physician prescribes for indigestion caused by consuming too much of ghee is again ghee but medicated with herbs. Similarly, work modified in a particular way is the specific for



removing the impurities and ill-effects of the work that we do everyday.

Normally, doing a piece of work should give us a pleasurable sensation like what children get while playing or a singer from singing. However, most people tend to look upon work as an imposition, a burden and a bondage. This is because of our wrong attitude to work- the attitude of doer-ship and enjoyer-ship. The attitude, 'I am the doer of action and therefore I must be the enjoyer of the fruit of action' is what spoils the joy of action. Our 'indecent clinging' to the fruit of action is the major problem. This is related to our sense of possessiveness and our attachment to sense-pleasures. If the 'enjoyer-ship' can be got rid of, 'doer-ship' will disappear as a matter of course in good time. Action without any thought of the fruit of action, profit or loss, victory or defeat, is the right attitude, the key that opens the secret of action. This is selfless action or *Karma-Yoga* or the path of action leading to freedom from action through purity of mind. *Karma-Yoga* in its seminal form is found in the *Isāvāsyopanishad* (verse 2); but as a philosophical system, it was given to the world for the first time by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (Chapter-III).

The real and only purpose of work is to exhaust the tendencies for work. It is to put an end to work and not to perpetuate it. It is like the patient going to the hospital to get

cured of the illness and to get out of the hospital as early as possible. In fact, it is work-tendencies that have brought us into this world of action, attachment and suffering, and therefore, escape from it is possible only by escaping from the urge to do action. *Karma-Yoga* teaches us the right attitude and the right method of action. It helps us to get out of the harmful ego-sense of doer-ship and enjoyer-ship. Instead, it teaches us to develop the feeling that we are instruments in the hands of God and that the work we do is worship to God. Immense is the benefit in adopting the *Karma-yoga* - method of work which is at once preventive and curative. We are able to exhaust the existing work-tendencies and to prevent new tendencies from entering the mind. The mind becomes pure, free and tranquil.

When we examine the nature of the ego-centric doer-ship - enjoyer-ship assumption, we see that it is both irrational and false. For example, when we say, 'I hear it, I see it', what happens is that the ear comes into contact with sound and the eye with an object. The 'I' is both irrelevant and unnecessary in hearing the sound and seeing the object. If the argument is that behind every action there is to be an intelligent agent, the answer is that it is the Self or the God (in us) that energises and illumines the senses, the mind-intellect equipment and the ego-sense, 'I'. The Self is the power behind every action attributed to the inert 'I'. If the Self or God is the real doer, the fruit of action must



necessarily go to Him. So then, the 'I' becomes a mere instrument in God's hands and the fruit of action an offering to Him. Not 'I', but God is to be the attitude of the true doer of action and the enjoyer of the fruit of action. The advantage in doing every piece of work as His instrument is that we can work freely, avoiding the mental disturbance which goes with our attachment to the fruit of action. Even in the thick of action, we will be at ease and at peace with ourselves.

There is no harm in enjoying the fruit of action either. But the trouble is in expecting and seeking it even before the action is begun. We arbitrarily decide that the fruit of action has to be this much, and that the whole of it must come to us. Now, for every action, there is a result, to be sure, but it is wholly unrelated to our expectation of it. Our expectation or calculation of the fruit of action as well as our exclusive claim on it has the only result of adversely affecting the efficiency in action and consequently the fruit of action. Our part is to do the work wholeheartedly and not to seek the fruit thereof.

For any action to bear fruit, five factors must come together and can 'I', the so-called doer who is only one of the five factors, claim the fruit of action entirely to myself? When an intelligent, hard-working student passes his examination with distinction, will it be proper for him to take the credit for it entirely to himself? Can he ignore the services of the excellent

faculty, the library facilities he has made use of, the grant of a scholarship he has enjoyed and so on? Experience tells us that behind every success that we ascribe solely to our own merit, there is the presence of some unseen power – call it God's grace or good luck – which figures as the principal factor. In any case, we have no right to lay claim to the fruit of any action to the total exclusion of the other factors equally responsible for bringing it about.

So, the *Gita* teaches us to work unattached, for the glory of God or for the welfare of the world. We are asked to develop the spirit of *yajna*, to work with a socially-oriented will, for the good of the world for which Nature is to be our model. The sun, the moon, the rivers and the trees live for others, hardly aware of the great service they do to make others happy. We are what we are today because a good many people have lived and worked for our welfare in many ways, big and small. We will be less than kind and more than cruel if we cannot give something in return to society. Usually, we act prompted by considerations of profit and gain. If there is no gain, we do not do any work at all. That is to say, all our actions are dictated by the lower qualities of the mind called *rajas* and *tamas*. Instead, our actions are to be motivated by *satwa*, by a sense of duty with no thought of any selfish gain. I feel a sense of contentment and joy in doing my duty which brings some measure of happiness to others. This is certainly a richer gain



and reward than the paltry fruit of action. If we adopt this attitude, work will no longer be a drudgery but an enjoyable sport and pastime.

It must be possible for the serious-minded to work like a master and not like a slave, a slave to name and fame, power and pelf. There is joy in work only in a condition of freedom, freedom from attachment. It is like the bee sucking honey from the flowers, never allowing its limbs to get stuck. Our only concern must be to do our duty with a free mind undisturbed by the hopes and fears about the reward. This world and the life in it can be looked upon as a garden full of beautiful flowers. Can we not enjoy its beauty without the thought of plucking flowers? When a lover of art sees a painting, he enjoys its excellence and perhaps wants to know the painter. Only a trader by buying or a thief by stealing will think of possessing it. Our aim should be to know God who is the master-painter of the world and not to be chained down to the world of action, attachment and suffering.

Practice of *Karma-yoga* makes our mind pure and strong by eliminating mental disturbances and distractions caused by the 'doership-enjoyership' of our ego-sense. It gives our mind a rare power of concentration with which we can increase our efficiency in action. However, *Karma-yoga* is not intended to make us an efficient businessman or a successful man of the

world. It is to convince us of the futility of selfish action moving in the vicious circle of 'action-enjoyment of the fruit of action-more action- more enjoyment' and so on. It is to escape from this whirlpool that *Karma-yoga* prepares us. Till we exhaust the work-tendencies in us in toto, in order and indeed in order to reach that stage, *Karma-yoga* insists on the nature of our work to be, "philanthropic efficiency with philosophic calm". In short, renunciation and service should be the philosophy of work, our work ethics which is the key to progress and prosperity in the world.

But, it is to be emphasised that worldly progress and prosperity is not the goal of *Karma-yoga*. It is the progress of man from worldliness to Godliness for which *Karma-yoga* really stands. The mind blessed with intense power of concentration is the tool fit for meditation on God. The mind, perpetually agitated by the desire for sense-pleasures, will now be enveloped by thoughts on God and His glories. This is devotion to God and *Karma-yoga* takes us to the threshold of divinity.

*Harih Om Tat Sat*



## ***Bhakti-Yoga :*** **The Path of Devotion**

Like *Karma-yoga*, *Bhakti-yoga* also leads man to liberation from worldliness. It is the path of devotion mentioned in the *Upanishads* and dealt with at length in the *Gita* and in the *Bhagavatam*. However, it was Sage Narada who systematised it as a spiritual science and discipline in his celebrated aphorisms called *Narada-Bhakti-Sootra* (s). *Bhakti-yoga* is the most democratic and resilient system of *sādhana* in so far as nearly all types of people moving Godward can make use of this path without any pre-qualification or the risk of a fall. It links up *Karma* with *Jnāna*, and so, it occupies the central position in the scheme of spiritual discipline. Since *Bhakti-yoga* is easier than the other paths, it is the most suitable one for the spiritual adherents of this age who are found wanting in will power and soul-force and are disabled by misfortunes of all kinds.

*Bhakti* is the same as *prema* which means love. If the love is for worldly objects it is called *kāma* or lust. The same when directed towards God becomes *divya-prema* or divine love. Devotion to God shows itself in our prayer and worship of God, singing His glories, remembering Him and serving Him all through life. Vedanta declares in unequivocal terms that we are essentially divine. The question then arises as to why at all should we show devotion to God? The answer is that at the present stage of our evolution, we are only potentially divine and that it is to make manifest this divinity within us that we show devotion to God. As long as we remain victims of the tyranny of Nature, both internal and external, devotion to God becomes not only necessary but inevitable. It is like our approaching a rich man, a scholar or a doctor to receive from them such gifts as will enable us to get rid of the limitations and imperfections from which we suffer. God alone is the master and ruler of Nature and for us to overcome the awesome forces of Nature, there is no other way except to reach and realise Him – *nānyah pantwfâ vidyate' yanāya*.

*Bhakti* can be divided into two broad categories : *para* and *apara* or *sādhya* and *sādhana*, that is to say, *bhakti* as the goal, and *bhakti* as the path or discipline leading to it. *Bhakti* as the goal admits of no duality, no difference between the devotee and God. It is not a relationship but an equation, the devotee of God becoming God Himself, like the river joining



the sea to become the sea itself. It is the devotee attaining the dimension of divinity where it becomes one with *jnāna*, the highest spiritual attainment. Therefore, *para(sādhya) bhakti* is also called *jnāna-bhakti*, the experience of absolute bliss felt by the *jnāni* in the state of *samādhi*.

But *bhakti* as the path spiritual discipline leading to the goal is an aggregate of innumerable moods and attitudes of the devotee, his manifold levels of relationship with God. It is 'awareness of God and nearness to Him progressing towards oneness with Him'. Here, the devotee is in the realm of duality and his concept of God is an all-merciful personal God so far forth and above him. The devotee approaches God assuming the attitude of a servant, a friend, a parent of a lover and all that the devotee asks for is to be near God to love Him fervently and serve Him with single-minded devotion. This is pure and unselfish devotion – *nishkāma-bhakti*.

But devotion to God can also be *sakāma*, touched by selfishness. Where human effort fails, the devotee prays to God for His grace and blessings in order to be free from grinding poverty incurable diseases. There are two other types of devotees, the seeker of knowledge, inquisitive of the mystery and meaning of life as well as the devotee who prays to God for His grace which alone can vouchsafe liberation to him. Selfish or unselfish, devotees belonging to these four types are alike

noble-minded and dearly loved by God, says Lord Krishna in the *Gita*. No doubt, the devotee seeking liberation is way ahead and above all others, for he wants nothing but God who is his ultimate goal and refuge.

*Bhakti* can be classified in many other ways as well. The *Gita*, as we have already seen, recognises four types of devotees and their devotion. Based on the attitudes and approaches of the devotees, Sage Narada divides *bhakti* into eleven types. *Sreemad-Bhāgavatam* classifies it in three different ways from the point of its quality, and calls it *tāmasik*, *rājasik* and *sātwick* or *prākṛita*, *madhyama* and *uttama* in this order of rising excellence, from the casual, infirm attachment to God shown by the beginner to the constant, mature devotion of the highly advanced. The *Bhāgavatam* speaks also of the well-known *nava-vidha-bhakti* based on the nine-fold discipline of devotion. It begins with *sravana*, listening to the chanting of God's sacred names and the singing of His glories, and goes on to the devotee himself chanting and singing God's names and glories (*keertana*) till he surrenders himself complete to the will of God (*ātma-nivedana* or *prapatti* or *saranāgati*). This represents the devotee's progress from duality to oneness with God in keeping with the elimination of his ego and ending in its extinction and mergence in God. In short, devotion is as numerous as the devotees.



Devotion can be described as the spontaneous and constant flow of the mind-stuff to God, like the Ganges flowing to reach the sea in all seasons. At the mere mention of God's name, the devotee's mind begins to melt in love and flow towards God where it dwells in great joy and peace. Even worldly things remind a true devotee of God and His glory. He wants only God and holds the over-lordship of the three worlds at a pin's value. Constant remembrance of God makes him a total stranger to the world around him. His is a God-centered life full of bliss in which he forgets himself. The devotee loses himself in God-consciousness to such an extent that his behaviour, like that of a mad man, is beyond the pale of social customs and laws. He knows nothing as sweet as remembering God and he feels the pangs of separation from Him so keenly that a moment will be like an eternity of agony.

Swami Vivekananda speaks of the triangle of divine love:

- (1) Love of God is for the sake of loving Him. The devotee cannot but love God as the sun cannot but shine or the river flow;
- (2) Divine love knows no competition or jealousy. In fact, the company of another devotee only intensifies his love of God;
- (3) It is marked by fearlessness, for where there is genuine love, there cannot be even a trace of fear. These are the signs of true devotion and of the devotee belonging to the highest order.

We have already seen that the progress of devotion is from duality to unity, eliminating the separateness between the devotee and God till the two become One, like the individual soul merging with the Self, as in *jnāna-yoga* or the path of knowledge. In order to reach this goal, the devotee has to go through a few devotional exercises or disciplines. First of all the devotee has to give up the life of ease and luxury, the life of sense-pleasures. He has to be free not only from the actual enjoyment of sense-pleasures but also from the desire for it. In fact, he has to be free from all attachments – friends, relations, possessions as well as the sense-objects to which he is attached. Thoughts about the world must necessarily go out of the mind if it is to be filled with God and Godly thoughts. Furthermore, the devotee has to engage himself in constant remembrance of God and in His worship or loving service to Him. This is the positive and negative aspects of the same discipline. However, the easiest and the most rewarding devotional exercise is *sat-sangam* or holy company which will be dealt with separately.

What are the advantages of *bhakti* as a spiritual discipline and who can hope to practise it with competence? It can be practised by one and all since no preliminary qualification is prescribed as in the case of *jnāna*. Among God's dearly loved devotees can be seen men and women of the lowest rung of society – the poor, the ignorant, the outcast and even the worst sinners. Most people are emotional by nature, not



rational or contemplative, and for them *bhakti* is the most suitable path. Similarly, most people are neither too much attached to sense-pleasures nor detached from them. Devotion is the discipline fit for those who ply the middle path of restrained sensory life.

*Bhakti* is essential for the two other major paths—*karma* and *jnāna*, for without it, they will be like rootless trees. Devotion to God, except at the highest level, is to a personal God who is the devotee's guardian and refuge. The devotee has only to depend upon God for everything and He will protect His child like the mother cat protecting its mewling kitten. The attitude of the devotee is one of dedication to God as of a servant to his master — 'not I, but Thou' attitude. The *jnāni* has the *so'ham* (I-am-He) attitude whereas the devotee feels that he is the servant of God (*dāso'ham*). Therefore, the risk of a fall owing to ego is minimal, if at all. Devotional discipline consists of chanting God's sacred names and singing His glories, alone or in the company of other devotees like himself, offering worship and doing loving service to God. These are easy, sweet exercises wholly free from the rigorous disciplines prescribed for the *jnāni*.

It is accepted on all hands that of the four goals of life, *moksha* or liberation is the highest. But great spiritual masters and teachers of *bhakti* like Lord Chaitanya say that *bhakti* is

the *panchama-purushārtha*, the 'fifth goal' in that the bliss in chanting God's names and singing His glories – *bhajanānandam* – is the greater gain than what is available in the *samādhi* of the liberated. Such was the experience of the liberated like Sages Suka and Narada who spent their time not sitting immersed in *samādhi* but in the bliss of singing God's names and glories. The *jnānins* are afraid of re-birth but not the true *bhaktas* of the type of Vritrāsura who only want to be swayed in the waves of devotion, birth after birth! Such devotees are not unhappy to be born even as flies, worms, mosquitoes etc, provided they are able to enjoy divine bliss remaining in those bodies. We are little concerned with spiritual ideals in the present age of materialism, unrest and anxiety. Even if we are, we do not have much self-control, will-power or soul force. Therefore, for us in this *Kali-yuga*, the Iron Age, *bhakti* or devotion to a personal God is the most practical path to reach Him with His grace and blessings.

*Harih Om Tat Sat*



## **Jnāna-Yoga :**

### **The Path of Knowledge**

This technotronic age of ours has witnessed an explosion of knowledge in all fields. And with every passing day, we are extending it to new horizons. This is very true indeed. However, Vedanta philosophy will point out that knowledge about the perishable, objective universe is lower knowledge, *apara vidya*. In fact, it is not knowledge at all, but ignorance. Real knowledge is *para-vidya*, knowledge of the imperishable Self, the eternal subject. And *Jnāna-Yoga* is the path leading to that knowledge.

The objective world is said to be unreal because it is only an objectified or externalised reflection of the world within. It has no existence independent of the one who sees and feels the world. My world is what my mind projects, so is yours and everyone's. There is no world which is the same for all. The

objects of the world might look alike but their value, meaning and usefulness change from person to person. We live in the same world but within it there is an infinity of worlds – the child's, the man's, the woman's and so on. There are as many worlds as there are individual minds which mould their worlds. The world of objects, of names and forms, is apparently, empirically true but not true in an absolute sense. The world is indeterminate and one is hard put to affirm or deny its truth. But 'I', the knower, the subject is always and absolutely true.

So then, 'I' the subject, the knower, the intelligent, conscious entity in each one of us is the centre of all knowledge. 'I' am the measure of all knowledge. In fact, all knowledge is in me and is shown on the screen of consciousness that 'I' am. But what do I know about myself unmodified by the limiting adjuncts? I know myself now as the body, at another time as the mind, and that yet another time as the ego. If 'I', the yardstick of the world, were to keep on changing from time to time, can I ever hope to get the correct value of the world? The key to the knowledge of the world, therefore, is knowledge of the Self. Instead of the question, 'What is the nature of the world?' it has to be, 'Who am I?', This is the old and awesome question asked by the philosophers of both the East and the West. Answer to this question answers all questions because it is all-knowledge, wisdom or perfect *gnosis*. Till that is known, nothing is really known and man



will continue to be tormented by grief, pain and a nameless fear.

However, it is seldom, if ever, that we ask the question, 'Who am I?' Vedanta declares that I am the Self, the eternal, unchanging witness, watching the eternally changing phenomena of the waking, dream and dreamless sleep which constitute my world-experience. I am not the individual being in bondage (*jiva*) but the ever-pure, ever-free and ever-awakened Self, the *ātman*. I am the *antaryami*, the indweller in every being-man, bird and beast-and the intrinsic integrality of the entire universe (*sarva-bhoo tāntarātmā*). This is my true nature of which I have no idea owing to beginningless ignorance or forgetfulness. We shall presently see whether this is merely a tall claim or a statement of fact.

If someone asks me, 'Who are you?', my answer will be that I am so-and-so, belonging to such-and-such a country and religion, aged so much, doing this job or that and so on. But I am none of these, for they are my name, my parentage, nationality, religion, age, profession etc., which are mine, related to my body. I am not the body or the senses or the mind: they are mine. Nothing that is mine can be me. How can my shirt be me? I think, feel and act as if I am the body which, of course, I am not. In fact, I have three bodies in three states of consciousness : the gross body in the waking

state, the subtle body in the dream state and the causal body in the dreamless sleep state. I am none of these bodies and their experiences; they are mine.

If so, who am I, then? I am the unchanging, unaffected witness of all these manifold experiences, the same 'I' watching with complete indifference the changing scenes in all the three states of consciousness. The same 'I' must be there watching everything so that 'I' can connect the experiences of the three states as the witness. 'I' am the one that goes in and through the three states and holds them together like the string that holds together the many flowers in a garland. Again, the same 'I' exist in and through my childhood, youth and old age, because 'I' remember the events of those periods of time 'I' have watched and witnessed. If so, 'I' must have existed before the birth of this body and must continue after its death. If there is to-day, it cannot be without an yesterday and a to-morrow. My existence of to-day is proof of my existence in all the tenses of time. Eternal existence is what 'I' am.

Similarly, 'I' am consciousness, awareness, knowledge. It is in the light of the consciousness that 'I' am that everything shines and becomes known. 'I' am awake even when all instruments of knowledge lie quiescent as in sleep for me to remember what I witnessed in sleep. From this, it is self-evident that 'I' am of the nature of knowledge, the ground of all



knowledge, pure consciousness. In my absence, nothing can shine, not even the sun, the moon and the celestial bodies. All will be sucked in and swallowed up by a vast void, a giant black hole. Likewise, 'I' am of the nature of pure joy, bliss. 'I' am the source of the joy in all objects. Life is enjoyable and all things in the world are enjoyable only because 'I' am of the nature of joy. The proof of it is the experience of unalloyed happiness all of us enjoy in deep sleep when the senses and the mind are put out of action and cannot bring any happiness to us. The source of happiness can only be ourselves. The 'I', the Self in each one of us is thus found to be of the nature of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss absolute.

But the irony of it is that 'I' do not know my own truth. 'I' am estranged from myself owing to ignorance or forgetfulness for which no reason can be given. Once self-forgetfulness takes place, wrong identifications naturally follow. So, forgetting that 'I' am the ever-pure and ever-free Self or Spirit, 'I' begin to feel that 'I' am the body, the senses, the mind etc., which are adjuncts that limit my real amplitude, my divine dimension. A lion's cub happened to grow with a flock of sheep with the result that it began to bleat and flee at the very sight of a lion in utter forgetfulness of its own leonine character. We are in the predicament of the cub and all that we have to do is to shake off the delusion that we are the sheep, which, of course, is not

that easy. *Jñāna-Yoga* helps us to recover what has been lost and rehabilitate us in our true identity of the Self.

Immense is the gain of this rehabilitation. For instance, mutations like birth, growth, decay and death affect the body and not the Self. Pleasure and pain belong to the mind, honour and dishonour to the ego, hunger and thirst to the vital breath and so on. By knowing, that is, experiencing our true identity to be the Self, we rise above all limitations and imperfections and the tyranny of the pairs of opposites which constitute our life-experience. Instead of living like a helpless slave of Nature, we become her master. We no longer suffer the indignity that we are the insignificant creatures of the universe. We become its creator. We will be like the ocean, always full and self-sufficient, and indifferent to whether the rivers empty their waters into it or not. We will no longer be like the little son of the house-owner begging the gardener for a rose in his own garden. We will walk the earth like divinised beings, our fulness leaving us nothing to want and our purity and holiness leaving us nothing to fear.

*Harih Om Tat Sat*



## **Holy Company**

It is accepted on all hands that God-realisation is man's ultimate goal in life. In fact, that is the final destiny of all creation. Modern science joins hands with ancient religion in pointing out that all orders of creation are slowly but inexorably moving towards perfection and fulness. Biologists like Julian Huxley no longer speak of evolution as a process or a fact. They speak of the qualitative improvement of the species and of the purpose of evolution. All creatures struggle to survive till they reach the stage of the human being. But from then onwards, evolution is no longer blind but conscious. For man, it is not limited to his physical or sensate growth but is extended to 'the greater fulfilment' which is called the 'psycho-social evolution' given only to man.

This is much the same as what religion describes as God-realisation or liberation from the process of birth and death, for which man alone is eligible. That is why birth as a human being is looked upon as a rare gain or a gift from God. However, the goal is reached only at the end of a long and hard journey. It is an inner adventure, a 'voyage within' across shoreless seas full of unknown dangers and hidden terrors. It is compared to walking on the sharp edge of razor. And that is why very few attempt it and fewer still achieve success in reaching the shore of eternity, of timeless paradise.

Of the three paths of *Karma*, *Bhakti* and *Jnana* (Action, Devotion and Knowledge) leading to God-realisation, the path of devotion is said to be the easiest or the least exacting. But even here, the spiritual aspirant is to leave off all sense-pleasures and lead an austere, ascetic life. Nor is that all. He has to give up even the desire to enjoy sense-pleasures. Which, of course, cannot be easy for any one used to a life of the senses! Yet, this is only the negative aspect of the devotee's discipline. The positive aspect is to keep his mind always on God, or to engage himself in the service of God in thought, word and deed. For a devotee, God and not the sense objects is to be the light and life and his heart's delight. The mind of such a devotee will dwell on God at all times and with effortless ease, like the steady, unflickering flame of the lamp kept in a windless place.



But for a beginner, these exercises are indeed severe and harsh. He begins to wonder whether there is no easier, less troublesome way for reaching God. Certainly there is such a way which is not only pleasant but also ensuring unfailing progress towards reaching the goal. And that is *Sātsangam* or holy company which is a gift from God rarer than birth as a human being and the desire for liberation. All spiritual aspirants highly prize holy company; but for the devotees of God, it occupies pride of place in their discipline. It is only from holy men that we hear of God and His glories. Again, it is companionship with the good and the godly which prepares the devotee's mind to do regular devotional exercises.

Holy Company means serving holy men with sincere humility and devotion and becoming worthy of their grace and blessings. If a devotee succeeds in earning their grace and blessings, he gets *sraddha*, unwavering faith and singleness of purpose as a result of it. For the mind to be weaned away from worldliness and directed towards Godliness is no small gain. That precisely is what holy company does. Holy men are like treasure - chests and if one is fortunate to get a little bit of the treasure of their blessings, one's spiritual poverty comes to an instantaneous end. It is said that holy company is the open door to liberation and no true spiritual aspirant needs fear that he will have to go with out securing holy company.

Holy men are those who are profoundly centred in God-consciousness. They are holier than the holy rivers because they have God enshrined in their hearts at all times. With a word, a touch or even a mere wish, they can transform the lives of the wordly and the wicked beyond recognition. And such souls, reformed by holy men in strange and unexpected ways, have come to live as spiritual teachers themselves. Nowadays, with religious discourses and spiritual retreats conducted in the many temples and ashramas, holy company is no longer a rarity as in older days. Most people, however, seem indifferent to its blessings and are apparently reconciled to what worldly life offers.

Every sinner, it is said, has a future just as surely as every saint had a past. No one, however wicked or sinful he may be, is beyond the compassion of a holy man. Sage Valmiki was a dreaded robber; so was Anguleemalan and so were two of the chief disciples of Sri Chaitanya Deva. Sage Narada was the five-year old son of a poor widow belonging to a low caste. Prahlada was the son of Hiranyakasipu, the *asura* king and Pingala was a prostitute. Yet, all of them were lifted up by the magnetic power of holy men to lead saintly lives. Holy Company lays an enchantment on the souls of those who come into contact with godly men. Then, some reminiscent bells seem to ring within them and their sleeping saintliness begin



to wake up. Holy company as a discipline continues right down to our own times and numberless are such reformed souls.

A holy man, like the philosopher's stone, can touch and transform the base metal of a worldly mind into one of pure gold of virtue and wisdom. He is a giant spiritual magnet drawing to himself all those who fall within the field of his magnetic influence till they become as holy as the holy man himself. Like the breeze from the *Malaya* mountains blowing all trees to sandalwood trees, the grace of a holy man blows even the weak and the wayward to spiritual heroes. The mere presence of a holy man causes showers of righteousness to fall like a soothing balm into men's hearts overheated by the triple sorrow of worldliness. Such is the amazing power of holy company in elevating men's minds Godward.

Holy Company is what every spiritual aspirant should strive for. In any case, utmost care has to be taken to avoid unholy or evil company. It is to be shunned like poison, killing its victim slowly, silently, almost unawares. Evil company takes the shape of an innocent-looking wavelet at the beginning. But soon it assumes the dimension of the all-devouring sea itself. Unholy company is like a spark of fire growing into a conflagration in no time. To rise to an eminent place in any field of activity is indeed very difficult. But one false step is enough for a fall in one's fortune, and with it, total loss and ruin. This is true also in one's spiritual life.

Numerous are the examples of the fall of great men due to evil company. Ajamila was a good brahmin before he fell a victim to the charms of a woman of loose morals. Soon, he became a voluptuary, a robber and a killer. King Purooravas was the founder of the lunar dynasty of kings whose valour and wisdom were sung even by the gods in heaven. But once he came under the spell of the intoxicating beauty of Urvashi, the divine damsel, he forgot himself and his status. He began to run after her unashamedly like one gone mad. Even more revealing and instructive was the fall of Sage Saubhari who was doing under-water meditation in the Kalindi. When he opened his eyes at the end of his meditation one day, he chanced to see some fish in the river copulating, which aroused his sleeping sex instincts. The result was that he decided to marry all the fifty daughters of King Mandhata. It was when he had become the head of a large family of wives, children and grand children that he woke up to the shocking realisation of his great fall from sainthood.

Eternal vigilance alone can prevent such a fall. The story of "the *Sadhu* and the Wasp" proves the point at issue. Seeing a wasp struggling in the flowing waters of a river, a *sadhu* tried to save it from drowning. Hardly had he taken it in his cupped palm when it stung the *sadhu* whereupon, in pain, he dropped it back into the river. He took the wasp again, again; the *sadhu* had to drop it back as it stung its saviour. When he tried to



save the creature the fifth time, one who was watching the whole proceedings asked the *sadhu* as to why, in spite of all his wisdom, he was doing such a foolish act! The *sadhu* replied, "you see, the wasp and I were in each other's company for a little while now. It did not change its way of life by being in my company. Do you want me to give up my way of life of kindness and take to its way of life of doing harm?" No harm will come to the spiritual aspirant if he is sure of his goal and remains ever vigilant against all pitfalls and dangers.





## **Western and Vedantic Humanism**

### **1. What is Humanism?**

Humanism, as the term indicates, is a philosophy which views man as the measure of all things. In its value-system, man is the crown and glory of creation and other orders of creation are important to the extent that they subserve his interest and well-being. That is why humanism is so much in the air and we continue to hear such a great deal about human values, human rights, human welfare and so on. Humanism holds the extreme view that arts and science, civilisation and culture as well as concepts such as good and evil, heaven and hell, God and the devil etc; are fashioned in the forge of man's brain for his sake. Its tall claim is that man is not only at the centre of creation but that he is the creator himself. It is not God who has made man in His own image but man who has made God in his image and given Him human attributes and emotions!

In any case, humanism gives pride of place to man's happiness and well-being in the scheme of life. As long as it adheres to the ideal that happiness of the human race is the highest good, humanism as a view and way of life is at once altruistic in spirit and universal in scope. But devoid of that humane-ness and love for fellow-beings, it can easily degenerate into an ego-centric, self-righteous and exploitative pursuit of sense-pleasures, into a philosophy of heartless hedonism. Humanism can then lead us, as indeed it did, to exclusiveness, intolerance and the self-defeating 'inhumanity of man against man'. A brief survey of the several humanistic movements will show how, after an astonishing initial progress, each one of them had to suffer a great fall. It is indeed sad that a philosophy as great and noble as humanism had faded into near-failure owing to its failure in the practical application of its principles in day-to-day life, the built-in defect common to all philosophies.

## 2. Greco-Roman Humanism:

Let us begin with Western Humanism which, in its origin, was co-extensive with Greco-Roman civilisation. Its ideal was the 'magnanimous man', the man of virtue and honour, with the emphasises on 'physical culture' of beauty and strength. It conferred manifold gifts and blessings on the Greco-Roman citizens who consequently enjoyed, high degree of comfort, luxury and dignity. But to the Greeks the non-Greeks were not



human enough to become eligible for the privileges enjoyed by them. Roman humanism which was extended to the whole of the Roman empire was more liberal. Yet, that too was exclusive in so far as it shut out all those who were outside the Roman empire. To their own slaves, both the Greeks and the Romans were less than kind and more than cruel.

The treatment meted out to the slaves by the Greco-Romans was inhuman. In their eyes, the slaves were mere chattel, not far removed from the cattle they bought and sold in the market, and were chained to hard labour all their lives. In short, Greco-Roman humanism was a great blessing to a good many people; but it was equally a great curse to a good many others. This inhumanity shown to the slaves could have been for the reason that Greco-Roman humanism was secular and pagan and alien to Christian virtues like mercy, forgiveness, charity and love. Yet, as a pioneer in the field of humanism, its contribution to human happiness and welfare was significant and fruitful.

### 3. Christian Humanism:

Christian Humanism embracing the whole of Europe was professedly religious and led by holy men of renunciation and service like St. Bernard and St. Francis of Assisi belonging to monastic orders. Faith in a merciful God, however, did not prevent Christian Humanism from becoming intolerant and

inhuman. In fact, secular humanism seemed more human and less harmful. Religious dogmatism, theological fundamentalism and an all-powerful church joined together to wipe out all dissidents like the scientists and free-thinkers. Inquisition was instituted against them, they were condemned as heretics, ex-communicated and burnt or drowned. More cruel than the Greco-Roman humanism to the slaves, mediaeval Christian humanism savagely suppressed the voice of dissidence. The victims of the intolerant church were Christian souls like Martin Luther Prokop, Hess, Joan of Arc etc.

The denouement came with the disastrous Thirty Years' war fought between the Catholics and Protestants of Germany in which 20 out of the total of 25 million people were sacrificed at the altar of true Christian faith! It was a harrowing, traumatic experience, very different from that of the euphorious crusades. This colossal Christian blunder and crime against humanity shook the faith in God of even the truly faithful and the God-fearing. They began to think that the idea of building the kingdom of God on earth was an exercise in absurdity, and a suicidal folly. Intelligent people were eager for a return to secular humanism; they were convinced that if only God chose to remain in His heaven above, all would be well with the world below!



#### 4. Renaissance Humanism:

The angry reaction to the costly human tragedy of the Thirty Years' war hastened the arrival of the Renaissance which swept through Europe from the mid-15th century to the dawn of the 20th. Renaissance Humanism affirmed faith in the man below rather than in the God above. This is reflected in such literary lines as, 'The proper study of mankind is man', 'The music of the spheres was drowned in the clatter of tea-cups'. Renaissance Humanism, spanning some four centuries, saw progress in every field of activity. If the first half of it witnessed a tremendous upsurge in literature and arts, the latter half was characterised by the Industrial Revolution, expansion in trade and commerce and manifold scientific inventions and improvements in technology. It opened the flood-gates for a life of abundance enjoyed in numerous ways with a vigorous mundane vitality. Most historians agree that Europe never had it so fine and that Renaissance Humanism was the high-water-mark and the golden era of Western Humanism.

#### 5. Modern Humanism:

The closing century of the Renaissance as also the twentieth century can be called the age of the Industrial-Scientific Humanism. It promised great human dignity and offered enormous, almost limitless material prosperity and comfort to the people. Western Humanism was coming of age

and emerging triumphant with the conceited claim that there was no problem which it could not solve and no goal that it could not reach. No doubt, the modern westerner could command every comfort and luxury. He had access to infinite knowledge and power. Yet, they were not available for all but were limited to the elitist, privileged few. The inevitable confrontation had shown itself in the 18th century in the form of the French Revolution. The storming of the Bastille was the symbol of the triumph of humanism. But it did not take long for it to degenerate into the Reign of Terror and the Great Reign of Terror ending with the despotism of Napoleon - a reversal of the goals of humanism.

The period of the Industrial-Scientific Humanism was also the period of colonial exploitation by the imperialist west. It also saw the struggle between capital and labour, between the haves and the have-nots. The apparent progress and prosperity of the West was at the cost of the dignity and happiness of the countless millions of people in the colonies as also of the oppressed and the disinherited in Europe itself. Besides, there were also national jealousies and ambitions at work threatening the prosperity and welfare of Europe. It was the calm before the storm, the storm of the two world wars and the nuclear holocaust. When the atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it was Western Humanism with the myth of its hollow claim of prosperity and plenty for the human race that



exploded sky-high and fell in a shower of ruin everywhere. Thereafter, it forfeited its right to speak even a syllable on humanism and the welfare of the world.

#### 6. Man's predicament:

The post-war predicament of the modern westerner was that nothing could save him from himself in spite of his enormous scientific knowledge and industrial power to increase his fund of comfort and happiness. It was because these were combined with his own abundant folly and divorced from the saving grace of religious-spiritual wisdom. The thirty years' war during the period of Christian Humanism destroyed man's faith in God. The lost faith, however, was recovered in the form of his faith in man himself during the Renaissance. But the two world wars during the modern Industrial-Scientific Humanism destroyed his faith in himself which left him with no focus of faith, human or divine. Thus, the man of today is alienated from himself, left lonely and rootless. A victim of cynicism, he is prone to violence and crime, alcoholism and drug addiction, reckless sexual indulgence and a host of other similar mental maladies.

It is against the materialist self-righteousness and scientific dogmatism of the modern era that western thinkers and humanists like Sorokin, Toynbee, Bertrand Russell and Will Durant have raised their voice of protest and warning. Modern

European literature describes the present times as an age of anxiety in which man lives with an emptiness of heart and a nameless fear. It is an age of hectic activity leading to no goal, of a robot civilisation-without any cultural vision, a sumptuous life without a same philosophy and infinite knowledge unblessed by wisdom. The result is that modern man, surrounded by articles of luxury in plenty to make his life happy, is embarrassed to find that his experience in life is increased disillusionment. He is assailed by feelings of weariness, despair, boredom and death-wish. This, so far, has been the questionable gift of Western Humanism to man.

#### 7. Marxian Humanism:

Enter Marxian Humanism, the new-comer, to occupy the centre-stage for some three quarters of a century. It was the champion of 'the hewers of wood and the drawers of water' and lent its powerful voice to the mute millions. In the course of a quarter century, it built up a modern communist empire of the working class which provided the people not only with free primary amenities but also education and health care equalling the best available in western democracies. But soon, it became evident that it was 'a barbarian's protest against barbarity' and that the 'workers of the world had *everything* to lose except *their chains*'.



Behind the iron curtain, blood-curdling atrocities were perpetrated on the dissenting or ambitious fellow-comrades condemned as revisionists or counter-revolutionaries. Marxian methods were strikingly similar to the mediaeval Christian persecution, like inquisition, witch-hunting, excommunication and the burning of the heretics at the stake. The claims of human welfare made by the communist state were hollow and highly inflated. The mighty champion of the lowly and the lost fell with feet of clay. Marxian Humanism was a huge hoax and myth, a seventy years' wonder which 'began with a bang but ended in a whimper'! The people under the marxian humanism suffered from all the de-humanising evils which plagued Western Humanism. It is just enough to say that Communist China's experiment with humanism is no whit different from that of Soviet Russia.

#### 8. Eastern Humanism:

Now, a word or two about Eastern (Buddhist-Islamic) Humanism. Buddhism preached virtues like an ascetic way of life, non-violence, compassion and loving service to fellow-beings by way of inter-personal relations. These, no doubt, are highly-prized values of life, most helpful in bringing about increased human dignity and well-being. Influenced by the message of Buddhist Humanism, Emperor Asoka banished violence and war from the Mauryan empire and replaced them

with human welfare activities. Buddhist Humanism had influenced even Christ and early Christianity. At one stage, it held sway over a vast area, from the western end of Europe to Philippines at the eastern end of Asia. Buddhist Humanism supplied the much-needed heart to the otherwise over-intellectualised philosophy of life, though it could not be accepted as a state policy for the people to practise in public. It enjoyed a brilliant but brief reign over the minds of vast multitudes before its wonderful spirit, fading brightly, was quietly absorbed by Vedanta.

The pure Arab-Islamic Humanism had made significant contribution in the fields of arts and Science - poetry, music, dance, painting, astronomy, medicine, architecture and so on - to enrich world civilisation and culture and thereby enhance human dignity and well-being. The Arabs were expert craftsmen, traders and sailors who not only increased the material prosperity of the people but also acted as messengers of learning and wisdom between the East and the West. Under benevolent rulers like Harun Al Rashid, the people enjoyed a rich life. From stories like *The Arabian Nights*, *Sindbad the Sailor* and poems like *Rubayath* of Omar Khayyam, one gets glimpses of 'the glory of ormuz', the life of richness and vitality nourished by the good and true Arab-Islamic Humanism.



But soon, it was mixed up with the Turkish-Mangol creed of war and conquest and religious fanaticism. Besides, a good deal of the man-made social laws (Smruti), meant to have only limited validity and relevance, was mistaken for eternal and inviolable injunctions of the divine (Sruti). Thus, Islamic Humanism with its message of universal love and brotherhood was short-lived, subverted by political power-play on the one hand and by religious fundamentalism on the other. And it is ironic, and indeed sad, that to-day, Islamic Humanism is spoken of in the same breath with Islamic Terrorism operating world-wide in different groups and under different names!

#### 9. Failure of Humanism:

This brief survey shows the astonishing rise and fall of humanism, marked, on the one hand, by genuine interest in human well-being, and by exclusiveness and intolerance, on the other. Dazzling achievements in man's happiness and prosperity were marred by tragic failures, causing more losses than gains in the bargain. Furthermore, the fruits of the experiments in humanism were not distributed to all alike. To some, they were a great blessing; but to most people, they were an inmixed curse bringing in increased pain and sorrow in their lives. In the final analysis, the picture that comes clear is that twenty five centuries of human endeavour have failed to usher in the much sought-after humanist social order of sanity and

goodwill, of sustained happiness and peace, which still remains a distant dream, an unrealised and unrealisable ambition. That, perhaps, is as it should be!

#### 10. Why Humanism failed:

Yet, one feels that we have gone wrong somewhere or all along the way in spite of our interest and earnestness in human welfare. In the main, three reasons for the failure can readily be pointed out: (1) Humanism was concerned throughout with the triumph of isms and ideologies-Catholicism and Protestantism, Capitalism or Communism, this school of thought and that-at the expense of the welfare of individual men and women. (2) Humanism failed to recognise man's divine dimension beyond his physical-sensate level of existence. (3) Humanism took into consideration man's material comforts and sense pleasures alone as constituting his happiness and well-being, ignoring the very significant element of spiritual contentment necessary for the consummation of the welfare of humanity. This defective and distorted vision of man and his happiness has been the one notable single factor responsible for our failure in realizing the noble goals of humanism. And, it is here that India's age-old philosophy of Vedanta can come in as a corrective measure.



## 11. Vedanta Philosophy:

The Vedantic view of man is that he is very much more than the perishable body with a soul but is the immortal soul lodged in the body. His essentiality is that he is a spark of the divine, energising and illuminating his body-mind-intellect equipment. Man's real identity is the divine Self which (who) is the indweller in all--man, bird and beast and the intrinsic integrality of the entire universe. This Selfhood is the core of man's being and the unfoldment of the Self within is man's highest destiny and duty. It is also the total development of the human personality which includes and far exceeds the lower levels of life--the physical and the sensory, the mental and the intellectual- like the footprint of an elephant large enough to contain those of all other animals. Like the hour-hand of a clock moving almost imperceptibly yet determining the time, the Self of a man determines the nature of man. In fact, the Self or *Atman* is the man and all else are envelopments limiting and cencealing his real identity.

Even an intellectual understanding of the grandeur of the Self will engulf man in waves of overflowing joy and self-fulfilment. In that state of utter contentment and self-sufficiency, he feels no want, no weakness, no limitation. For such a man, there is no question of the 'indecent clinging' to sense-pleasures which are just dolls of salt or sugar that melt in

a moment and be nothing. Such a man of spiritual enlightenment is India's hero-soul, her ideal man -- A Buddha, or a Sankara, a Ramakrishna or a Ramana, a Vivekananda or a Mahatma Gandhi. Such a man - a superman or a god-man - can use his knowledge and power only for the good of the world and not at all for self-aggrandizement. That society which gives birth and nourishes such a spiritual hero is sure to enjoy all prosperity, happiness and peace.

## 12. Vedantic Humanism:

Materialism can never be the basis for any healthy and lasting humanism, for it is the breeding ground of vices like selfishness, acquisitiveness, jealousy, hatred and so on, leading to exploitation and enslavement of others, tyranny and war and ending in untold human misery. On the contrary, genuine humanism can be derived only from spirituality, the view of life that looks upon man as the Self of all, which is the true basis of universal love and the brotherhood of man dear to humanism. Educated and trained in this spiritual way of life, people will develop virtues like love and compassion to fellow-beings and a sense of renunciation and service in order to make our world a happy dwelling place for mankind. Spirituality urges man's inner evolution, altering and elevating his consciousness from his ego-centric individuality to egoless personality God-centred universality. In short, Vedanta aims



at *divinised humanism* as its goal in its inter-personal relations at the social level.

### 13. Its defects, weaknesses:

That is not to say that all has been well with us in India influenced by Vedanta all through the ages. Far from it. We have had more than our share of exclusiveness, intolerance and oppression of the poor and the lowly by the privileged. This was brought about by the orthodox Brahmin priests and pundits whom Swami Vivekananda condemns with the expressive epithet, "the Pharisees and Sadducees in Hinduism, hypocrites, who invent all sorts of orgines of tyranny...." (Complete works, V - 15). Their betting sinse was the indiscriminate practice casteism and untouchability by which they fenced out nearly all classes of people except themselves from the enjoyment of all pleasures and privileges.

### 14. Its strength:

But it is of great significance that the fight against this evil was led by spiritual masters like Sri Ramanujacharya, Swami Vivekananda, Chattambi Swamikal and Sri Narayana Guru. Foreign invasions and conquests had left us in such a sorry state of affairs that we forgot to feel that we were human beings. From that state of diffidence and inertia, we were lifted up to manly dignity, self-confident action and freedom by the

power of religion and spirituality breathed by Shivaji Maharaj, Swami Vivekananda, Tilak, Gandhiji and others. Time and again, it was the soul force supplied by India's spirituality that saved her from national crises and disasters.

### 15. India's gift to the world:

The greatest blessing of Vedanta on us is that we have never conquered other countries, plundered their wealth, uprooted their household gods or destroyed their religions and culture. No doubt, we have conquered others with our spirituality, with our music, art and literature only to enhance the quality of their life. "May all the worlds be happy; let no one suffer from pain and sorrow" has been our constant prayer. This is in contrast to the behaviour of the conquering races, "with the blast of war trumpets, the march of embattled cohorts and soaked in a deluge of blood..followed by the groans of millions, by the wails of orphans, by the tears of widows", as Swami Vivekananda puts it picturesquely (Complete Works, Vol. III - 103). Vedanta teaches everyone his real nature, the *Atman* and invites everyone to reach his own divinity. It is this gift of the spiritual light that India has made to the world.

Let us hear what will Durant, the author of *The Story of Civilisation* has to say on India's gift to the world, "It is true that even across the Himalayan barrier India has sent to us such questionable gifts as grammar and logic, philosophy and fables,



hypnotism and chess, and above all, our numerals and our decimal system. But these are not the essence of her spirit; they are trifles compared to what we may learn from her in the future..... Perhaps, in return for conquest, arrogance and spoliation, India will teach us the tolerance and gentleness of the mature mind, the quiet content of the unacquisitive soul, the calm of the understanding spirit, and a unifying, pacifying love for all living things". (Our Oriental Heritage, P. 633) Similarly, Arnold J. Toynbee says, ".....it is already becoming clear that a chapter (of the world's history) which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race".

This is what the world expects from us, flooding the world with spiritual thoughts and ideas. This is also our historic mission, our sacred trust. But one wonders whether Independent India tending to go the western way in an increasing measure is equal to the task. Simultaneously, increased religio-spiritual activities are seen taking place to offset the all-devouring influence and ill-effects of modern over-materialism. This much is certain, however, that the philosophy of Vedanta alone can remedy the defects and drawbacks of the fractured western humanism. Therefore, India's Vedanta should persist in its continued quest, in T.S. Eliot's words, "to recover what has been lost and found and lost again and again" -- *Divinised Humanism*.

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## **Sri Krishna, the Perfect Incarnation**

Driven by the powerful force of some inner compulsion, all of us find ourselves thrown into the swift-flowing river of action and churned in the eddies and whirlpools of attachment and suffering. Related to this is the other dilemma of action and the fruit of action chasing each other. We are prompted to do an action by our desire to enjoy the fruit of action. Its enjoyment, in its turn, prompts us again to do another action. This goes on in a vicious circle, leading us to its natural extension of an endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Very rarely and very few among us attempt to get out of this grinding wheel of *karma* which leaves us crushed and bleeding by the wayside. Those fortunate souls who struggle to overcome the forces of Nature soon realise that their own effort is sadly inadequate for release from Nature's tyranny. Then, the cry goes up from their hearts in fervent hope and prayer to the all-merciful God for help; and He comes to them, even as the mother bends down

to kiss and caress the weeping baby in the cradle. This is the incarnation of God.

*Avatara* or incarnation literally means the 'coming down' (of God); and their faith in His advent is as old as the Vedas. Like water becoming ice, the nameless, formless God assumes a form and a name - usually of a man - and comes down into the midst of human beings. The descent of divinity is for the ascent of man. However, the concept of God's incarnation has undergone changes from time to time. No matter what type of configuration conceals His divine amplitude, an incarnation of God is in full possession of the six-fold power and glory of God at all times. And the one purpose of His advent is to help spiritual aspirants reach the supreme goal of God-realisation.

During the Upanishadic period, God appeared before the devotees in answer to their prayers in the guise of a great sage and *guru*, like Nara-Narayana, Sri Dakshinamurti and sage Dattatreya who were looked upon and addressed as *Bhagavan* or God. There was absolutely no difference between them and God—God in human form. During the *Darsana* (Philosophy) period, an incarnation of God was known by such names as *Mayateeta* (One who has transcended the beginningless nescience), *Kalpa-niyamaka Iswara* (The Lord who controls the Great Cycle of time calle *kalpa*), *Prakriti-leena-Purusha* (the Person in whom Nature lies quiescent), *Adhikari-Purusha* (the



Person of supreme authority over the beings) etc. However, it was in the *bhakti* movement during the period of the *Purānās* that the concept of the divine incarnation came to be crystallised into the form of a firm faith and clear experience in the minds of the devotees of God. They directly perceived the presence of God guiding them to the goal with the love and care of a guardian or companion.

Sri Ramakrishna describes God's incarnation as a large ship that takes innumerable beings across the sea of *samsara*, the sea of pain and sorrow. Sri Satya Sai Baba's description is that an incarnation of God is the aeroplane that carries hundreds of devotees who have the valid papers of *sraddha* and *bhakti* (faith and devotion) over land and sea to 'the supreme abode of Vishnu', comfortably and in quick time. Those people who are fortunate to be born during His advent and drawn towards Him somehow are blessed indeed, for they are assured of an easy passage to their life's destination in this birth itself. An incarnation takes us by the hand and helps us jump over several life-times to reach the door of liberation at one bound!

The purpose of an incarnation of God is to establish righteousness in the human heart by destroying the evil tendencies and nourishing the virtuous ones residing within each one of us. Thus, we are enabled to reach and realise the divinity of the nature of eternal bliss inherent in us. For this,

God had to come down into our midst time and again assuming the required measure of divine power according to the needs of the times. This is compared to the many rills, big and small, flowing down the hill from an ever full lake. They were called *amsa-kala-avatars* (incarnations with limited powers) like Vamana, Parasurama, Balarama, Veda-Vyasa and so on.

But Sri Krishna is described as the complete and perfect incarnation by the author of *Sreemad-Bhagavatam* for His incomparable, limitless compassion towards all, friends and foes alike, and conferring immortality on them. Pootana, the ogress who approached Him with the evil intent of killing Him was the first to receive it and she was followed by a number of demons of whom Aghāsura, the embodiment of sin, was the most wicked. As if not satisfied with saving them in singles, Sri Krishna decided to offer liberation to masses of people - the millions who gave up their lives on the battlefield of Kurukshetra and again, the entire Yadava dynasty before He left this world for His supreme abode.

Sri Rama was the embodiment of truth and righteousness and was endowed with all human virtues. There was the touch of regal splendour, of nobility, valour and wisdom in whatever he said or did. He was a hero-soul, the ideal of man in every walk of life, almost a superman. Yet, he was essentially a man subject to human weaknesses like anger, grief, attachment,



despair etc. Sri Krishna revealed at every turn that He was divine without doing the least injury to His human aspect. In fact, He enacted the human drama with such consummate skill that only once or twice was He compelled deliberately to show the mind-boggling splendour of His divinity. Yet, all His actions were amazing and out of this world.

There was nothing royal or majestic in Him as in Sri Rama. He was not a king but a commoner, such a one as to become a king-maker. He was always playful, and a boyish, mischievous smile used to light up His face even in His old age! This was to conceal the awesome omnipotence of His divinity of which he was in full command at all times. He was like the burning charcoal covered with ashes. What burnt brilliantly for all to see was His infinite love and compassion for his devotees for whom He was the unfailing, ultimate refuge.

The word 'Krishna' means 'one who destroys all sins', as also 'one who attracts all'. His wonderful ways, His boyish pranks, naughty tricks and mischievous practical jokes during His days in Gokulam and Brindavan in particular, are so charming that they hold every heart in thrall. His grandeur and glory are as indefinable and universal as His gospel, *The Bhagavad Gita*. Even when He shone as the universal soul beyond human understanding, He appeared just as an ordinary human being. He was the beloved friend and

companion of the cowherds of Brindaban, even of the cows and forest trees. He was the heart's delight of the *gopis* as much as he was the guardian and protector of helpless devotees like Princess Draupadi and Queen-Mother Kunti Devi on countless occasions. He was the architect of victory for the Pandavas in the Mahabharata war and yet the enjoyer of the famous warriors like Bhima and Arjuna although He was just the unarmed charioteer of Arjuna.

He was God Himself to men of wisdom of the calibre of Vidura, Bheeshma and Uddhava. To sages like Vyasa and Narada and even to Brahma Deva Himself, Sri Krishna was the supreme Brahman far beyond their understanding. Yet, He showed that He was the servant of King Ugrasenan as well the charioteer and messenger of His true devotees, the Pandavas. At the Rajasooya sacrifice, He was willing to do the lowly duty of washing the feet of the guests, forgetting for the sake of His devotees His own incomparably lofty status as the one worthy of receiving the highest worship due to the noblest among the royal assemblage (*agrapuja*). He was the object of constant meditation of even evil-minded kings like Kamsa, Jarasandha and Sisupala though it was motivated by fear, enmity and hatred for Him. In short, Sri Krishna was the Indweller enshrined in the hearts of all, great and small, friends and foes.



Sri Krishna was supremely self-sufficient in everything and was free from all wants and problems. He was never seen with a grave and unsmiling face. His very cheerful presence instilled courage and confidence in those who went to Him with their vexing problems. There was nothing that He was yet to earn and enjoy in the three worlds. Yet, He was seen always at work doing good to the world with a mind free from all attachments and thoughts of profit and loss, victory and defeat. This was how He wanted Arjuna to do his duty as a Kshatriya prince and that was how He had performed His mission as an incarnation of God. He knew that the annihilation of His own Yadava dynasty was His final act in His divine - human drama and He did it with supreme detachment and calmness of mind. Sri Krishna's wonderful life was the most comprehensive and authoritative commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, His unique message to the world.

His life and message are the quintessence of the Upanishadic wisdom - *Advaita*. It teaches every one that the self alone is and that the ego-sense, 'I' and the world of objects are magnificent illusions superimposed on the Self, our true nature. It is beginningless ignorance that conceals our true identity and projects the false identification with the body, the senses etc. If and when we wake up from the dream of ignorance, we come to realise that all the misery of worldiness that we have suffered so long and so intensely has only been a

dream. The truth is that we are of the nature of *Sat-chit-ānanda*, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss absolute, which nothing can touch or alter. The experiential understanding that we are the Self, the eternal, imperishable *Atma* is the goal of human life.

To attain this goal, the three time-honoured paths are *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnana* (action, devotion and knowledge). It is this threefold path that Sri Krishna has highlighted symbolically in the three outstanding landmarks in His life -- the *Rasaleela* dance, the message of *Gita* and the Advice to Uddhava just before the end of His earthly sojourn. No doubt, all the three lead us to the central message of *advaita*, apparently with altered emphasis on each of them: *bhakti* in the case of *Rasaleela*, *karma* on the *Gita* and *jnana* on His Advice to Uddhava. The one lesson that Sri Krishna seeks to teach us by these three episodes in His life is that we are essentially divine and that our supreme duty and destiny is to become aware of our divinity, then to move closest to it and finally to become one with it.

Thus God (Self) realisation is not a relationship with God but an absolute equation with Him, like the rivers joining the sea to become one with it. When we feel in every moment of our life and in every pore of our being that we are God ourselves, we also feel that the entire universe is pervaded and interpenetrated the same divinity that is our true nature. This



is the summit and summation of all existence and experience. To bring us to this divine consciousness is the mission of His advent and having fulfilled it, He rings down the curtain on His human drama.

The story of Sri Krishna's incarnation makes it clear to all that there is nothing that is not associated with Him in some way--villages and towns, hills, valleys and forests, trees and rivers, birds and beasts, children and the grown-ups, gods and demons, kings and commoners, devotees and denouncers, war and peace and so on and on. One cannot think of anything without at the same time thinking of Sri Krishna, for He is in all. His image is large to be limited to the sacred books like *The Mahābhārata* and *Sreemad Bhāgavatam*. He is present in our literature, music, arts, in our legends and fables, our proverbs and folk-lore. In fact, He is the warp and woof of our very life. How very barren, colourless and empty will our life be without Sri Krishna's presence! It will be like honey without its sweetness, a flower without its beauty and fragrance or a temple without the holy of holies. No incarnation of God has blessed us so uniquely and so comprehensively as Sri Krishna. That is why he is described as not only the perfect incarnation of God but God Himself -- *Krishnastu Bhagavān Swayam*.





# A Vedanta Miscellany

Tulaseeteerthan



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